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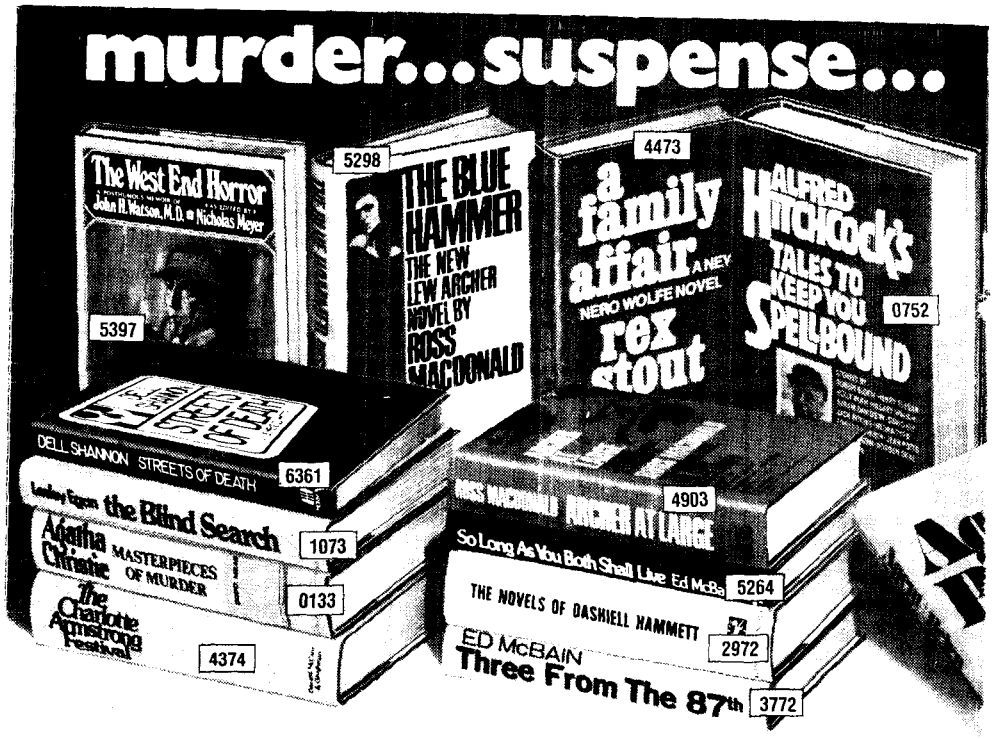

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a *NEW* Petrella story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

A general comment on Michael Gilbert's literary modus operandi: Mr. Gilbert has an interesting way with a plot. He releases the details slowly and often with deliberate ambiguity, and it isn't until the end that all the pieces fit, like a completed jigsaw, and we see the full picture. A most satisfying technique! . . .

"Mutiny at Patton Street" is one of Michael Gilbert's most exciting stories. The tension begins to build from the first paragraph, and really takes off when the expression in Petrella's eyes becomes "the cold composed look of a matador facing a dangerous bull" . . .

MUTINY AT PATTON STREET

by *MICHAEL GILBERT*

It was half-past six and it was getting dark when the knock on the door came. Mrs. Milton, the wife of Fred Milton the bookmaker, was just lifting the kettle from the gas ring to make tea. She called through to her twelve-year-old daughter, Sylvia, "Go and see who it is, love."

Sylvia put down the magazine she was reading and got reluctantly to her feet. Nurse Patricia had just slapped the face of young Dr. Fosdyke and it was clear that young Dr. Fosdyke, who was tall and dark and had deep blue eyes, wasn't going to take it lying down.

Mrs. Milton heard her daughter's high heels tittupping down the passage, heard the door open, and then heard something that sounded like a scream quickly cut off. She put down the kettle and hurried back into the living room, in time to be knocked down by a backhanded swipe across the eyes.

From the floor she saw a second man come into the room

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carrying Sylvia. He had one arm round her body and a big hand clapped over her mouth and nose. Both men were wearing masks made out of nylon stockings.

The man who had hit Mrs. Milton, and who seemed, from his build and general appearance to be the younger of the two, sat down and stretched out his legs. He said to Sylvia, "One scream out of you and I'll kick your Ma's head in. Understand?"

Sylvia nodded. The man who was holding her let her go and she slipped down onto the floor and sat there, sobbing quietly.

The young man swung one well-shod foot and hooked it over a small table. A china dog, a glass vase, and a framed photograph of Mr. and Mrs. Milton on their wedding day crashed onto the floor. The young man then picked up the table, swung it round his head, and pitched it into a cabinet full of crockery.

Mrs. Milton had climbed back to her feet. She was still dazed. She said, "What—" and stopped.

"Yes?" said the young man politely.

"Why are you doing this?"

"You'd better ask your old man when he comes home."

"Fred's never done nothing to you."

"That's right. He hasn't done what he ought to have done. He hasn't paid his dues. This your daughter?"

"Yes."

"How old is she?"

"Twelve."

The young man got up, walked across to Sylvia, put one hand down, grabbed the front of her dress, and jerked her up to her knees. The dress ripped down the front.

"She's a big girl for her age, isn't she?"

Desperation in her eyes, Mrs. Milton bolted for the kitchen door. The young man pushed out a leg and tripped her. She fell forward, hitting her head on the door as she went down.

"Like I was saying—" said the young man.

In the room upstairs old Mrs. Milton, who was nearly 80, had got out of her bed when she heard the smash of glass and china. She was not a fast mover. First she tottered across to the window and drew up the blind. Then she padded slowly back to the electric-light switch by the door. She knew what she had to do. Up, down. Light off, light on. A second terrifying crash downstairs. Off, on. Darkness, light. Off, on. Darkness, light.

Mrs. Robbins, who had the house which backed the Milton's,

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saw the agreed signal and ran for the telephone. When the two squad cars reached her house, she gabbled out an explanation. Sergeant Blencowe said, "On foot from here. You two with me, three round the back. Sharpish."

The older and larger of the two intruders put up a fight. It lasted for three seconds. Blencowe had a daughter of his own and was in no mood for picking daisies. He hit the man once, and as he doubled up in agony, jerked a knee under his chin. The younger man had run for it and was halfway out of the kitchen window when Lampier caught hold of one foot and started to twist it. As the man was forced over onto his back, Lampier brought the sash of the window down across his throat.

Fred Milton arrived as they were tidying up. The two men had been taken to Patton Street Station and Mrs. Milton was away being patched up in the local hospital. Sergeant Milo Roughead gave him a brief account of what had happened. When Mr. Milton had got over the first shock he said, "You'll put these men away?"

"For a long, long time," said Milo. "In fact, with a bit of luck, we might be able to pick up the rest."

"If you can do that," said Mr. Milton, who was short and fat, but not lacking in courage, "it'll be worth it. Almost."

"It'll be worth it quite," said Milo. "We won't need to bother your wife until the morning, but we'd like your daughter to come along and make a statement. I could drive her in my car."

"All right, Sylvie?" said Mr. Milton.

Sylvia thought it was quite all right. The Sergeant was tall and dark, like young Dr. Fosdyke, and had deep blue eyes. She was feeling better already.

"The older of the two," said Petrella, "is a man called Dimitri Ossupov. On this occasion he was a conscript, rather than a volunteer."

"That's his story," said Superintendent Watterson.

"Agreed. We've only his word for it. But I've got a feeling he might be telling the truth. He was in the leather business and was bought out by Augie the Pole. He got the money back to his family, who live on a farm near Cracow. I expect the Bank of England would be interested to know just how he did it. Anyway, he was planning to go back there and settle down to a little farming. He was more or less ordered to come out on this last job to keep an eye on young Stanislaus. He's Augie's kid brother."

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"I see."

"What I was thinking—"

"I know what you're thinking," said Watterson. "I could put it up to the legal boys. Evidence by an accessory. It's not a line they're too keen on. It might be worth it in this case."

"If it puts Augie away," said Petrella, "it will surely be worth it. He's a nasty customer."

Dimitri said much the same thing to Sergeant Blencowe. He seemed to bear him no ill will for loosening two teeth in his lower jaw.

"He will be mad," he said. "Quite mad. That young brother of his, Stanislaus. He was ver' fond of Stanny."

"No accounting for tastes," said Sergeant Blencowe. "I thought he was a nasty little sod."

Dimitri considered the matter and nodded his head in agreement. "He is a nasty little sod, yes. But not as nasty as Augie."

It was at the third of these discussions that the proposal finally took shape. Blencowe reported it to Petrella.

"*If* we could guarantee to get him out of the country, he'd stand up in court and give us the works. Enough to put Augie and Stanislaus and two or three of the worst of his friends away for a long time. It's a lovely setup they've got down there in Little Baltic. It's not just money from honest citizens like Milton. That's almost a sideline. They collect a regular levy in cash from their compatriots who work down there. Skin money, they call it."

"Skin money?"

"That's right. You've got a choice. Which would you rather part with? Your money or your skin? Remember that body we pulled out of the river a month ago. There wasn't enough of him left to identify him. Dimitri says it was a new arrival from Lithuania who refused to pay up. They flayed him alive before they put him in the river."

Petrella took a deep breath and said, "It's time we finished them."

He was in his office late that same afternoon, writing an urgent recommendation to Division to this effect, when his telephone rang. He had two lines. One went through the station exchange, the second was a direct line. The number was known to a few very private informers who wanted to talk off the record.

"Detective Chief Inspector Petrella?"

"Yes."

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It was a thick gravelly voice. The labored enunciation, with equal stress on each syllable, suggested a foreigner who had learned most of his English out of books.

"I have a suggestion to make to you, Inspector. Tomorrow morning Stanislaus Volk and Dimitri Ossupov will appear before the magistrate for a further remand. They will be transported in a police tender. There will be a driver and a policeman in front. There will be only one man in the back. This will be thought sufficient, since they will be handcuffed."

"Any other arrangements you'd care to suggest?"

"The man in the back will be you. Stanislaus will succeed in slipping off his handcuffs. They will have been inefficiently fastened. At a moment when the vehicle is halted by the traffic, he will hit you, hard enough to knock you off balance, and will make his escape. He will be out of the country by that evening."

"Haven't you forgotten Dimitri?"

"Dimitri you may keep. I have no further use for him."

"That's very generous of you. But if you don't mind, I think we'll keep both of them. The general opinion is that Stanislaus will get ten to fourteen years. He shouldn't have touched that girl."

The voice at the other end said, in the same deliberate tone, with the words well spaced out, "I think you would be well advised to consult your wife before you finally make up your mind."

Petrella was aware that someone else had come into the room. He sat, gripping the telephone and staring at it. The voice said, "You understand what I am saying?"

"Where does my wife come into it?"

"She does not come into it. But she might advise you to cooperate. We have taken charge of your son."

Petrella tried to say something, but no words came.

"If you want him back with his skin on you will follow my instructions to the letter. Neither you nor your wife will say anything of this to anyone."

There was a click, as the receiver was replaced, and a purring sound on the disconnected line.

Petrella made three attempts to put the receiver back on the hook. He had some difficulty in unclenching his hand. Finally he left the receiver lying on the desk, got to his feet, stared at Sergeant Roughead who was standing beside the desk, and left

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the room without saying a word. Milo heard him running down the passage.

Milo replaced the receiver, took it off again, and dialed. A voice said, "Father Amberline here."

"It's me, Father, Milo."

"What can I do for you, my boy?"

"Patrick's new flat is just around the corner from your vicarage, isn't it? Could you get round there quickly? There's been some trouble. I think they're going to need help. Don't say I told you. But hurry."

"I was planning to call on Mrs. Petrella anyway," said the Reverend Amberline. "I'll go over right away."

It took Petrella fifteen minutes of panic and frustration to reach home. First he discovered that both police cars were out on duty. Then he wasted further minutes looking for a taxi. Then he started running.

When he arrived breathless, the front door of his flat was open and he could hear voices from the sitting room. One was the comfortable bass of Father Amberline. The other he scarcely recognized as that of his wife. She was lying back in a chair and there was a long livid bruise down the side of her face. When she saw Patrick she tried to get up, but the priest put a hand on her shoulder. He said, "Concussion. Nothing worse, I think. I've sent for the doctor. She oughtn't to move about too much until he's seen her."

She said, "They took Donald. They came in here and knocked me down and took him. I'd have killed them if I could, but I had nothing to do it with."

"We'll have him back," said Father Amberline. "Never fear. Just rest easy now."

"Yes," said Petrella. "We'll have him back." He seemed to be thinking. "Would you look after things here, Father? There's a lot I have to do."

"Surely, surely."

There were a few signs of disorder. A table had been overturned. The telephone had been torn out of the wall. In the corner was a building which Donald, an ambitious four-year-old architect, had been constructing when the men arrived.

Petrella took a last look around the room. There was an expression on his face which Father Amberline, had he been a Spaniard himself, might have recognized. It was the cold com-

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posed look of a matador facing a dangerous bull.

Outside it was beginning to get dark. Petrella found a taxi and dismissed it at the end of Archer Street. When Mrs. Sullivan saw who it was, she tried to slam the door. Petrella pushed it open, not rudely but quite firmly, and went through into the kitchen.

Mrs. Sullivan pattered after him. She said, "You've put away my son Patrick. Is it me you're after now, then?"

Petrella ignored this. He sat down in a chair in front of the stove and said, "I want to talk to Michael and Liam."

There was something in his voice which Mrs. Sullivan evidently found hard to understand. It was not threatening. It was certainly not placatory. It was the flat voice of someone asking for something which was going to happen anyway.

"I might fetch them," she said, "if you'd tell me what you want with them."

"I'll tell you when they get here," said Petrella.

Mrs. Sullivan looked at him once again. Then she picked up a shawl and started to wrap it round her head.

"Quickly, please," said Petrella.

Mrs. Sullivan went out, closing the door behind her. Petrella sat quietly staring into the red heart of the fire.

Michael and Liam Sullivan were big men, though not as tall or as broad by a few inches as their brother Patrick. They drifted into the room, treading softly, and stood looking down at Petrella.

Petrella said, in the same flat voice, "Three weeks ago your brother Patrick was charged with theft. The charge arose from the discovery of stolen articles concealed under the floor of the coal shed behind this house. We should never have found them, in fact we'd never have suspected they were here, if we hadn't had a direct tipoff."

Michael Sullivan said, "Ah," and sat down on the edge of the kitchen table, which creaked under his weight.

Petrella said, "I am assuming you have no idea who gave us this information."

Mrs. Sullivan said sharply, "Careful what you say, now." She could fee the tension building up.

Petrella ignored her. He said, "I'm prepared to sell you that information."

There was a long silence. Then Liam said, "It's not normal, if I understand correctly, for members of the police force to say where their information comes from."

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"This is not a normal occasion."

"You mentioned selling. What price exactly had you in mind?"

"In return I want what your brother Patrick once offered me. I want to know where I can find Augie Volk."

"Augie the Pole is it? You want enough to put him away?"

"No. I want to know where to find him tonight."

The two big Irishmen looked at each other. Finally Michael nodded and Liam said, "He has a place he and his boys use. It's not in his name. It's an old meat-packing station. It lies behind the Foundry, in Lower Dock. He should be there tonight."

Petrella said, "Thank you," and got up. Michael said, "You were going to tell us—"

"I've already told you," said Petrella.

By eight o'clock he was back at his desk writing a note. It covered two pages in his neat handwriting and was addressed to Superintendent Watterson. He was finishing it when he heard footsteps in the passage. He looked up as Sergeant Roughead came in, followed by Sergeant Blencowe and Detective Lampier.

Petrella said, "What on earth are you doing here? You're all supposed to be off duty."

Milo said, "It did just occur to us that you might be needing some help."

"What put that idea into your head?"

"Something Father Amberline said to me."

"I see."

"Then we heard from Sergeant Cove that you'd drawn a gun from the Armoury. So we put two and two together and came along."

Petrella put the two sheets of paper into an envelope and sealed it. He said, "I don't know what answer you got when you put two and two together. But whatever it was, it was wrong. I'm going out tonight to do a job. If I'd needed any help, be sure I'd have asked for it."

He put the envelope on the mantelpiece, walked to the door, and held it open. The three men trooped out ahead of him.

Downstairs they found Station Sergeant Cove looking unusually wide-awake. Petrella said, "Let me have the keys of the smaller car, Harry. I'll be back in about an hour. Thanks."

He went out, leaving the four men staring after him.

The night was clear, but the moon was not yet up. Petrella

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drove carefully, using the smaller roads, keeping north of the Causeway and heading down toward the river. The light reflected from the dashboard showed his face composed and passive.

When his instinct told him that he had gone far enough he stopped, backed the car into a gateway, switched off the engine and lights, and got out. He could hear cars passing along the main road, but everything round him was silent. He locked the car and started to walk, padding along quietly over pavements damp with the mist which came up from the river every evening.

When he turned the corner and found he was in Lampe Lane, he had his bearings. Lampe Lane led to Stable Dock, so called because it had once been used to land pit ponies brought down from Yorkshire for the Kent mines. Both the dock and the light railway which served it were now unused, but they formed a backstop which would prevent him from overrunning his objective.

The first turning off Lampe Lane was Colinbrook Street which ran along the frontage of the foundry. The next must be Palance Street. The meat-packing station would be the last of the three gaunt buildings on the river side of the street. He remembered that a passage had been marked on the map running down west of the packing station and leading to the wharfside.

He approached with caution. The first two buildings were derelict. The third was occupied. There was a glimmer of light filtering out through the clouded glass and grime of one of the ground-floor windows. Something else too. The sound of men's voices from the lit room.

On one side of the main door a notice, barely decipherable, said: *Henders Bros. Canning and Packing. Deliveries at Rear.*

Petrella thought about it. The rear would be deserted. It was a lot to hope that it would offer any point of entry. But it was his best chance. He slipped and skidded down the passage, which was an inch deep in filth, and came out into the open space behind.

The main part of the packing station was joined at one end to an extension which was one story higher and carried two chimneys. Outlined against the night sky, paling with the coming of the moon, it looked like the hulk of a ship, its bridge and funnels cocked at one end, like a ship run ashore and left to rot.

The ground-floor windows and the windows of the floor above were heavily barred. The double doors, presumably designed for deliveries, looked as though they had not been used for years.

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It was while he was studying them that Petrella heard footsteps coming down the passage. More than one person. There was no easy way out. On one side a spike-topped wall marked the edge of the old wharf and to the right an equally high wall blanked off the railway line. He squeezed himself back into the doorway, cursing as he did so. If he had to use his gun, all surprise would be lost. What had started as difficult would become starkly impossible.

There were three men. It was not until they were quite close to him that Petrella recognized them.

"We thought we'd find you round here somewhere," said Sergeant Roughead.

Petrella said, in a voice to which relief had added almost as much venom as the fright which had preceded it, "I told you not to come."

"That's right," said Milo cheerfully. "You told us not to come, but we decided to come anyway. In the army it's called mutiny."

Petrella struggled to find something to say. Before he could start Sergeant Blencowe said, moderating his normal bellow to a hoarse whisper, "We brought Len along. If anyone can get into this place he can."

Milo said, "Do you think you can do it, Len?"

Detective Lampier examined the back of the building, which was becoming clearer each minute as the moon edged up.

"Piece of cake," he said.

He tested the drainpipe which ran up the far corner of the building. Then he started to climb. He might have been going up a staircase. When he got level with the first of the unbarred windows at second-story level he held the pipe in one hand and swung himself across to the sill. There was a soft tinkle of broken glass, a moment's pause, and Detective Lampier's slender body disappeared through the window.

"Lovely," said Milo. "He picked up the knack from his old man, did you know? He was the finest cat burglar in London, Len said. Didn't give it up until he was over sixty."

"I'm not sure—" said Petrella.

"We're not going in that way," said Milo. "He'll get that door open somehow. It's only bolted or barred."

It took ten minutes to do it, but finally, reluctantly, and with assistance from both sides one of the double doors was forced open enough for them to slip through.

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"We'll leave it like that," said Petrella. "We may have to duck out quick." He was using his torch as he spoke.

"Back stairs over here," said Lampier. "Lead all the way up."

"What's at the top?"

"Sort of storeroom. Raw hides, I guess, by the smell. There must be another staircase at the other end."

"We'll go up to the top, across and down the second staircase. That should bring us out in the front hall. Before we go, I've got something to say. One piece of insubordination you can get away with, but not two. From now on, if I tell you to do something—whatever it is—you do it and you do it without arguing. Is that understood?"

"Quite understood, Skipper," said Milo, who seemed to have appointed himself as spokesman for the three. "You say jump, and we jump."

Lampier led the way. They climbed the back stairs, crossed a long attic room between mounds of strong-smelling skins, and went through an unlocked door onto a landing. Then they went down. They took their time and made very little noise.

The room from which the light was coming faced the foot of the stairs. They stopped to listen. There were at least three men talking—two normal male rumbles and one curiously high-pitched voice. Petrella knew that it was the first two seconds that were going to make all the difference. He said, "Blencowe and I will go in as close together as we can. You two follow and fan out. Anyone in there makes a wrong move, hit him at once."

Then he started to run the door handle, very slowly.

The voices went on talking.

As soon as he felt the door give, Petrella kicked it open and jumped through.

There were three men in the room. It was furnished as an office, with a big safe in one corner, and a rolltop desk. One man, the oldest of the three, was sitting on a swivel chair behind the desk. The second, an enormously fat man, was balanced on a stool at a table covered with the remains of a meal. The third, and youngest, was squatting on the edge of the table.

There was a moment of paralysis. Then the young man started to reach inside his coat. Before he could do any more, Blencowe hit him—a swinging blow which knocked him off the table. As he went down he hit his head with a crack on the edge of the safe.

The other two men had not moved. Either the surprise of the

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attack or the sight of the gun in Petrella's hand kept them nailed to their chairs.

The man behind the desk had a flat white face, two small black eyes like currants in a suet pudding and a stubble of gray hair, shaved closely over his skull. When he opened his mouth he showed a lot of gold. He said, "You had no right to do that, Inspector."

Petrella recognized the voice which had spoken to him on the telephone. He said to Blencowe, "We'll have the handcuffs on both of these men. Hands behind their backs. Then search them. The one on the floor too."

The search produced a gun from the shoulder holster of the man on the floor, which Blencowe took charge of, an eight-inch black-handled skinning knife in a leather sheath from the fat man, and nothing from the Pole.

The Pole said, "This is irregular; you have made no charge."

"There will be a number of charges," said Petrella. "Owning a gun without a license, for a start. And a general charge of extortion, conspiracy, and kidnaping—against all of you."

"You have no proof of a kidnaping."

Petrella looked directly at the Pole for the first time since he had come into the room. He said, "That is the next thing I mean to attend to."

There was an unlit table lamp on the desk. Petrella pulled it out of its socket and jerked out the long flex. He said to Lampier, "Hobble his ankles. Leave him enough slack to walk, but not to run."

He gave his own gun to Milo and said, "The three of you can keep an eye on these two. That one may be shamming, I don't know. If either of them makes a move you don't like, shoot their feet off." Then he got behind the Pole, jerked him onto his feet, and said, "Walk."

"I refuse—" said the Pole and gave a sharp gasp. Petrella had driven the point of the knife into his back.

"Word of advice, chum," said Blencowe. "I should do what you're told and do it quick."

The Pole shuffled to the door, and took a quick look back. The young man was still on the floor. They had rolled him over when searching him and the swollen bruise on his forehead was visible with blood oozing slowly out of it. The fat man was perched on his stool with his hands behind his back. The sweat was standing out

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on his forehead. The Pole shuffled out into the passage. Petrella followed and shut the door carefully.

The fat man started muttering to himself.

"Something bothering you?" said Blencowe.

"What's he going to do to him?" The piping voice made him sound like a frightened child.

"I should think he's planning to cut little bits off him with that knife," said Blencowe. "What do you think, Milo?"

"That would be the main course," said Milo. "He wouldn't get round to it straight away. For starters I guess he'll pick off his fingernails."

"What he might do," said Lampier, "I read about an Indian who did this, he might cut out his kneecaps."

The scream, when it came, was two rooms away, but it was so loud that it made the fat man jump. With his hands manacled behind his back he was unable to keep his balance and toppled off the stool. Blencowe and Lampier hoisted him back again.

"The point is," said Blencowe, "suppose he passes out before the Skipper can get the info he wants out of him. There'll only be one thing for it. He'll have to come back and start on our friend here."

The fat man said, "It's no good doing anything to me. I don't know where the boy is."

"And who said anything about a boy?" said Milo gently.

The fat man looked at him. His lips were moving, but he seemed unable to speak. Milo said, "Augie made a mistake there. The Skipper's half Spanish. It's the Spanish half that's operating just now."

The second scream was muffled, as if it was made through folds of thick cloth.

Petrella ran up to the landing on the next floor. The door at the top was locked, but he had a key. His hand was shaking so badly that it took him almost a minute to get it into the lock. Then he opened the door and switched on the light.

In this room dressed hides were stacked in bales which covered most of the floor space and were piled high against the walls, with a narrow passageway between them. Petrella went to the far end and started shifting the bales. Behind them was a low closet, bolted on the outside.

Donald was curled up inside. He was asleep. When Petrella picked him up he said something that sounded like "Mummy."

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Petrella carried him back down the stairs and into the hall and said, "Sergeant Blencowe."

He had hardly raised his voice, but Blencowe came running. He grinned when he saw Donald. Petrella said, "Give me a hand."

Augie was lying on the floor of a small bare room. His ankles were shackled to the radiator.

Petrella stooped over him, still holding Donald, and jerked the cord free. Augie stared up at him. His lips were drawn back from his teeth and a trickle of saliva had run down from the corner of his mouth. His small black eyes were alive with hatred.

"Take this thing back to the office," said Petrella. "He can walk if he wants to. There's a telephone on the desk. We'll need another car."

Blencowe dragged the Pole to his feet and started frog-marching him down the passage. Donald had opened his eyes. His face puckered for a moment, as if he was going to cry. Then he said, "Put me down. I want to walk."

"All right," said Petrella. "Stand on your own feet. I've got a little tidying up to do here. Then we'll all have a ride home in the car." He found a piece of sacking and was rubbing it over a patch of something damp on the floor.

Blencowe pushed the Pole into a chair beside the fat man and had his hand on the telephone when both windows splintered at the same moment, and the shotguns opened up.

Two sawed-off shotguns, at close range, throw a lot of shot. Lampier had hurled himself flat on the floor under the window and was out of range. Blencowe was protected by the desk. Milo, who was opening the door to let Petrella in, collected half a dozen pellets in his right arm. Most of the rest of the contents of both barrels went into the Pole and the fat man and tore them into bloodstained pieces.

Over the roar of the explosions they heard a car starting up.

"There's not much doubt about it," said Superintendent Watterson. "It was the Micks. They must have got wind of the fact that Augie shopped their brother and gone down there to even the score. I doubt if we shall be able to prove it. No one saw the car, and the guns will be in the river by now."

"Do we want to prove it?" said Commander Baylis. "I take it we're not shedding many tears over those two beauties. I'm sorry Sergeant Roughead picked up some of the strays. What were our

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men doing down there, by the way?"

"Information received," said Watterson cautiously. There had been elements in the story as reported to him which he had found puzzling. "They wanted to see what was in that safe. One of them went for a gun. Blencowe knocked him down and he hit his head a smack on the safe. Lucky not to fracture his skull. He was out cold during the whole episode. As soon as he's out of the hospital we'll be charging him with illegal possession of a firearm."

"Right," said Baylis. "Put Blencowe in for a commendation and I'll back it. What about the stuff you found in the safe?"

"Some of it's identifiable stolen property. The rest of it seems to be bits of jewelry and rings and watches. Mostly old and some of it foreign. I think we shall find it's stuff that Volk extorted from his fellow countrymen. He wasn't a very nice character."

"He didn't die a very nice death," said Baylis. "Have you had the autopsy report yet?"

"I've got it here," said Watterson. "Faulds did it for us. He's something of an expert on wounds. He says he's always surprised at the damage a shotgun will do. Some of it looked like extensive burning and cutting."

Baylis was reading the report. When he had finished he said, "Yes. I imagine you get all sorts of freak effects when a thing like that is loosed off at close quarters."

"I imagine you do," said Watterson.

There was something else to be said.

"About Petrella," said Baylis. "I understand he's given notice of resignation. Do you know why?"

"It's his wife. She lost the child she was expecting. It upset her badly. Patrick wants to take her right away."

"Surely we could organize that for him without losing him altogether? I haven't seen a lot of him, but he struck me as a very good man. Too good to lose."

"He's one of the best officers I've ever had working for me," said Watterson. "If things had gone differently, I'd have tipped him to end up as Assistant Commissioner."

This was handsome of Watterson. His own promotion to Chief Superintendent had come through that morning and he was young enough to hope to climb to the top of the ladder himself.

"Do you think we can talk him out of it?" said Baylis.

"I think so," said Watterson. He added, after a pause, "I hope so."

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a *NEW* short story by

JEAN L. BACKUS

We are happy indeed to introduce Jean L. Backus to our readers. Her first appearance in EQMM is a bittersweet story about the advance of age in women, and the loneliness and unhappiness that growing old can bring with it . . . The narrator and Jim had thought it was an adventure without danger, an excitement without consequences. They had been wrong—the danger was a smoldering volcano, the consequences were an eruption . . . a sensitive and touching story . . .

LAST RENDEZVOUS

by JEAN L. BACKUS

I resented the old woman's approach, not having driven 150 miles along a rugged coast highway to be an unwilling dinner partner at Little River Inn. Particularly so early in my short stay. But I'd been told 30 or 40 years ago that a lady was always kind to old people since she herself would be old one day, and perhaps unhappy and lonely as well. Now my time had come, and I had no need to be reminded of my age and circumstances. But as usual I hated to be in the position of rejecting anyone.

"No," I said, as she stood waiting by my table, "nobody's with me. I'm alone." Which was the solitary truth—family dead, friends dead or moved away, everyone I'd ever loved gone off without me.

"It's not good for a woman to eat by herself," she said, sitting in the opposite chair. "And that makes two of us. What are you drinking?"

"Gin and tonic, no fruit." Even then I should have told her I was in a poor mood for company, because her voice and gestures jangled my nerve ends. I looked at her more closely. Short gray

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hair, carelessly brushed, a blue pants suit, wrinkled and slightly soiled; she looked neglected. My own hair was white, but so far I had not neglected my appearance.

"Why, that's what I drink too," she said, beaming. "I'll have one tonight, I think. Where are you from?"

"The Bay Region."

"I used to live there," she said. "I live here now. This is as close to a home as I'll ever get, unless they put me in the booby hatch someday. What are you going to eat?"

"Petrale sole." I'd stayed at the inn and dined in this room at this table before. Tonight the sole, tomorrow night the salmon. The next morning I'd be gone, leaving behind all that was precious and good in my life. Only memories now, but once a man had sat opposite me at this table, he down from the north, I up from the south.

For 14 years we'd met every other month for a weekend together, walking on the beach at the mouth of the river, driving around the headland to watch the surf on the rocks at sunset, and retiring to the same cottage after a superb and leisurely dinner.

"And apricot cobbler." I spoke aloud, out of my thoughts.

"We have rhubarb cobbler tonight," the hostess said at my side. And to the woman across from me, "Miss Barnes, did you ask the lady if she minded your sitting with her?"

"Yes, I did." Miss Barnes flushed unbecomingly. "She didn't tell me I couldn't."

I said, "Perhaps you'll excuse me after all. I intend to eat very slowly tonight, and I have something serious to think about." Immediately I wished I'd kept still. Miss Barnes looked about to weep. But it was too late. The hostess, after a prolonged argument, led her away to another table, somewhere behind me.

The waitress brought me a bowl of clam chowder, and normally I'd have savored every spoonful. As it was, I could hardly swallow. By the time the salad arrived, however, my thoughts were back on Jim and how he'd always ordered oil and vinegar while I took the roquefort dressing.

Food had been one of the things we had in common, although he was married, a drygoods merchant in Eureka, while I was single, a librarian from Concord. I had hobbies and friends, I kept up with the news and theaters and concerts, I read a lot; I was fairly well content. When I met him, he had no interest beyond his work and his children, whom he adored and for whom he maintained

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the semblance of a marriage. Periodically he had to get away from his wife, and one time we turned up separately here at the inn. Our rooms happened to be next to each other, and on our way to dinner we collided as we locked our doors.

But we sat at separate tables to eat. I certainly hadn't thought of a possible friendship, much less an affair, on that first meeting. Yet, as we acknowledged later, both of us felt the impact of looking at a stranger and thinking how nice it would be if we could have been together.

Call it luck as I did, or fate as Jim did, we kept colliding all the next day—in the village, up Fern Canyon, and finally on the headland at sunset. "This is silly," Jim said as he left his car to come sit in mine. "Tomorrow let's spend the day together."

It took another accidental weekend before I accepted what Jim said had been obvious and inevitable to him from the beginning. Probably it was his immediate honesty about his family situation that persuaded me to let my unexpectedly insistent fantasies become a reality, because I was never in any doubt as to the source of his interest in me, and if I were honest, the source of my interest in him. We represented adventure without danger, excitement without consequences, love without responsibility . . .

Behind me, Miss Barnes asked for a doggie bag because her little dog was starving, she said, and anyway, she couldn't eat all her sole. Suddenly I couldn't finish mine either.

The hostess came to refill my water glass. "Sorry about that," she said quietly. "Poor Miss Barnes has a habit of accosting the other guests, and tonight you were elected. It must be very annoying; I do apologize."

"It's all right," I told her. "Only I feel sorry for her because she seems so lonely, and—well, isn't she a bit out of touch?"

"Out of touch," the hostess said. "She's senile, poor thing. I'm afraid we're going to have to do something about her." I winced and covered it with a cough. Then she added, "Oh, you aren't eating. Isn't the fish all right?"

"It's perfect, thank you."

She nodded and moved away, while I took another bite of sole, remembering how Jim had always called it ambrosia and said we were the gods. Laying my fork down again, I got out a cigarette and my lighter.

"Could I have that little bit of fish you're not going to eat?" Miss Barnes asked, right at my elbow. "It's for my dog."

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"What about bones? I never give my dog fish for fear of his choking on a bone."

"My dog eats anything I give her," Miss Barnes said, holding her doggie bag open. Then she leaned closer, her voice barely audible. "That's a lie. I want the fish for my lunch tomorrow. You see, retirement isn't all it's supposed to be these days."

Silently I transferred the remnant of my sole to the doggie bag and was relieved when the waitress came to lead Miss Barnes back to her own table.

Thought of my own retirement, not so far off now, was so unnerving that I left the dessert, finished my coffee, and went out through the bar onto the long front porch of the old inn, with the rose vines climbing up to the wooden scrollwork of the gabled windows and eaves. In front was the parking area where my car stood among others, and beyond the highway running below the property were the rocks with the sea pounding the shore under the dark old windblown cypresses.

I considered what I wanted to do and decided to get my Sheltie and feed him before we walked down the hill to the beach.

Miss Barnes was right behind me. "Is your doggie with you?"

"Locked in the car."

"Oh, dear, they say it's dangerous leaving children and animals in locked cars."

"I left the window partly open," I said. "Anyway, I'm going to feed him now and then go to bed."

Her smiled faded. "Oh, dear. I thought maybe you and I could go for a walk."

"Not tonight." And hastily I added, "Thanks."

"I'm sorry." Her eyes filled with weak tears. "I'm being tiresome, aren't I? It's a part of growing old not to know when you're being tiresome. That and being retired. What about you? Are you retired?"

"Not yet." But I would be. Any day now.

She shook her head. "You won't find it easy when you do. People die or drop away from you, and finally you're alone, with nothing but your regrets to sustain you." She looked far out to sea where a fishing vessel was beating the waves back to port. "I was young once, you know, and there was a man who found me attractive. But nothing came of it."

"Why not? Did you quarrel?"

"Oh, it was my fault." She faced me, lips quivering. "You see, I

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didn't trust him. He said he would leave his wife for me, but I thought he was just trying to—oh, you know. Then he died, and I discovered he'd gone ahead and started a divorce. If he'd lived, I think he would have come after me again. By the time I found out what I truly wanted, it was too late."

"I'm sorry," I said, and helpless to comfort her, I escaped to my car, put Star on his leash, and took him to my room for his meal. He gobbled it as usual, finding no strange smell from the phenobarb I'd put in the food I'd brought from home.

When I was sure Miss Barnes had disappeared, I took Star down the path through the red alders and young firs, past the Oregon grape and elderberry bushes, and across the highway to the beach at the mouth of the river. Here the water was calm, and I let Star run in and out of the waves, his barking already muted and uncertain. He got all wet and shook himself feebly when I whistled him back and restored the leash.

He was my second Sheltie, Jim having given me both dogs to remind me of him during our separations, he said. When the first Star sickened and died, I was inconsolable and felt it was a bad omen. But Jim simply went out and bought the second puppy for me. Now the second Star was twelve years old and I couldn't bear to see the way he was aging, because it was like a reflection of my own state.

We walked around to the point where I stood hypnotized by the surf pounding up and over the glistening black rocks and falling back, leaving ruffles of white foam . . .

"The seahorses are riding high tonight," Jim said in my ear.

I felt his arm around me, and leaned back wanting only to preserve and extend the love and security he gave me. Wanting it harder and oftener as the years rolled by, worrying that he was tired of me, resenting the sterile two months between our weekends, frequently mistrusting his ultimate intentions. In this I was unreasonable, for I'd known from the beginning ours would be love without responsibility, but the force of resentment swept me along anyway.

And sensing this in me, he tried to make it all right again by saying, "Oh, God, I'd give my life to go south with you tomorrow."

"Do it then."

"I can't. You know I can't, not unless—"

"Not unless she divorces you, which she won't, or the children become mature enough not to be damaged." I threw back the

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words he always used whenever I spoke of the future. Not that I often did, because I respected his love for his children, his desire to protect them, or their image of him. But that didn't prevent the slow rot of distrust from growing in my mind . . .

I sighed and turned to go, thinking of Miss Barnes. "I thought he was *just trying to—oh, you know.*"

My poor old Star came dragging after me, already asleep on his feet from what I'd put in his food. Finally I had to pick him up and carry him like a baby in my arms. He died an hour after I got back to my room, and I sat weeping all night because I lacked the courage to finish what I'd started.

When daylight came, I wrapped the body in a blanket and carried it out to the car where I placed it on the passenger seat. Then I sat there beside him until it was time for the dining room to open.

I couldn't eat, but the coffee helped, and so did being seated at the table near the fireplace where Jim and I had always sat. Until the last morning when I'd come here alone while he still slept in the cottage we'd shared for the past two nights.

Presently I went out to the car again, and with Star's body beside me, drove off to visit our favorite headland and sit watching the water burst on the rocks for the rest of the day. I'd have given anything to bury Star there under a carpet of Indian paintbrush, lupines, and poppies, but it was public property.

I returned to the inn after sundown and had barely seated myself and ordered a drink in the dining room when Miss Barnes came to my table.

"Good evening," she said, face aglow. "How's your sweet little dog today? Not locked in the car again, I hope."

"My dog? Star?" I swallowed. "Oh, he died last night."

"Why, you poor thing! What happened?"

"Please. If you don't mind, I can't talk about it."

"Of course not. I'll sit down and keep you company—"

"Please don't, Miss Barnes. Please leave me alone."

The hostess heard me and led the old woman away.

I ordered the salmon and toyed with it. After refusing berry cobbler, I went straight to my room and sat down to wonder what I should do about Star's body, which was still in the car. I couldn't think where to take it, or whom to ask for help. All I could think about was poor old Miss Barnes, and how in a way I resembled her: not accosting strangers in the dining room, not yet; but

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inside, where it counted, and where I'd worked for eight long years to contain it. Now, if I could, I had to recall the last night Jim and I ever had together. Not as I would like to remember it, but as it really happened . . .

He had said that his wife was going to tell his children if he didn't give me up.

"Oh, Jim, no! She wouldn't."

"Well, she said she would. And it will devastate the kids. The youngest isn't quite fifteen, and I can't stand even the thought of their disillusion and hurt."

"What did you tell her then?"

"I said I'd think about it."

He didn't look at me as he spoke, and believing he'd already made his choice, I lost control. I said unspeakable things, made unreasonable accusations and threats. I was beside myself, and all the resentment and distrust in my festering mind came out until at last we faced each other, pale and shaking, utterly washed up, and we both knew it.

Jim was the first to break the silence. "Before I left home, I thought of another way, if you're willing. I'd rather die with you than live without you."

Shaken to my fibers, I finally agreed.

So we made our pact and went to bed for the last time, close and warm together as if nothing had changed. Only in the morning he didn't wake up—and I did.

After weeping for a time, I'd gone for breakfast which I didn't eat and driven straight home, a journey I don't remember. Nobody ever came after me, though I presume his wife must have had difficulty convincing the authorities who she was because nobody would have recognized her as the woman who'd been registered as Jim's wife so often at the cottage.

Later when I went to Eureka and read his obituary in the local paper, I discovered she'd had enough influence to hush up the circumstances. Death from a heart attack, the notice read. But it should have said murder, because at the last minute and without saying so to Jim, I had panicked and failed to keep the suicide pact we'd made . . .

I stirred at last, calm and not unhappy as I got the bottle and swallowed the rest of the phenobarb tablets Jim had handed me eight years ago on the night, when in my madness, I believed he intended that only I should die . . .

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a *NEW* short story by

BRIAN GARFIELD

Seven men had come out to Longshot Bluff to kill the hardrock miner. And then came the eighth—a kid, maybe eighteen, maybe twenty. And as the miner's wife said, "The old buck knows all the tricks" . . .

THE GLORY HUNTER

by BRIAN GARFIELD

On the evening when the kid came to kill him, the man returned from the day's labor at his usual time.

The man and the woman went out each morning from the ruined fort to the cliff. It was about a half-mile walk. They worked side by side inside the mountain.

In the course of four years of work they had tunneled deep into the quartz. Hardrocking was not easy work, especially for a man and woman both in their fifties and neither of them very large in size; but they accepted the arduous work because it had a goal and the goal was in sight.

Inside the tunnel they would crush the rock together and shovel it into the wooden dumpcart. They would wheel the cart out of the tunnel and dump it into the sluice that the man had designed in the second year to replace the rocker-box they'd begun with. The sluice carried water at high speed. This was water that came down through a wooden flume from a creek 70 yards above them, above the top of the low cliff. The floor of the sluice was rippled with wooden barriers; these were designed to separate the particles and retain the heaviest ones—the gold flakes—while everything else washed away downstream.

It was a good lode and during the four years they had washed a great deal of gold out of the mountain, flake by flake. Most of it was hidden in various caches. When they made the forty-mile

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muleback ride to Florence Junction for stocking up, they would take only enough gold dust to pay for their purchases; the town knew they had a claim back in the Superstitions but from the amount they spent it appeared they were barely making ends meet. They had never been invaded by gold-rush crowds.

They'd started working the claim when the man was 51 and the woman 48 and he figured to quit when he was 56, at which time they should have enough money to live handsomely in one of those big new gabled houses over in San José or Palo Alto or San Francisco. They'd be able to afford all the genteel things. In the meantime they worked hard to pay for it, pitting their muscles and pickaxes against the hard skeleton of the mountain.

The mountain was called Longshot Bluff because it was topped by a needle-shaped pinnacle like the spike on a Prussian helmet; from up there you could command everything in sight with an unobstructed circle of fire and because of the altitude you could make a bullet travel an extremely long distance.

The cavalry, back in 1879, had chased a small band of warriors onto the mountain and the Apaches had taken up positions on top of the spire. There were only five Apaches; there were 40 soldiers in the troop but the Indians barricaded themselves and there was no way the army could get at them. A siege had ensued and finally the Apaches were starved out. After that the army built the little outpost on a hilltop about a mile out from the base of Longshot Bluff. Troops had occupied the post for five years; then the Indian wars came to an end and the camp was abandoned. It was the ruins of this fort that the man and the woman used as their home.

The abandoned camp had no stockade around it; the simple outpost consisted merely of a handful of squat adobes built around a flat parade ground. There had been a post-and-rail corral, but travelers had consumed the rails for firewood over the twelve years since the camp had been decommissioned by the army. The man and the woman had kept their four mules loose-hobbled for the first few weeks of their residence; after that they let the animals graze at will because this had become home and the mules had nowhere else to go.

When you sat on the veranda after supper, as the man and the woman often did, you faced the east. You looked down a long easy hardpan slope dotted with a spindle tracery of desert growth—catclaw and ocotillo, manzanita and cholla and sage. The foot of

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the slope was nearly a half-mile away. At that point you saw the low cliff where the man and the woman had drilled their mining tunnel. Beyond it lofted the abrupt mass of Longshot Bluff. The pinnacle was perhaps 800 feet higher than the fort. From this angle the spire appeared as slender as a lance, sharp enough to pierce the clouds. It stood, as the crow flies, perhaps three miles from the veranda.

They came in from work in the late afternoon and the man packed his pipe on the veranda while he waited for supper. Over on the southern slope of Longshot Bluff he saw briefly the movement of an approaching horseman. From the window the woman must have seen it as well; she appeared on the veranda. "He'll be too late for supper unless we wait on him."

"Then we'll wait on him," the man said.

It would take the rider at least an hour to get here and it would be about 45 minutes short of sunset by then. But the man went inside immediately and opened the threadbare carpetbag that he kept under the bed.

The woman said, "I hope he's not another glory hunter." She said it without heat; when the man glanced at her she cracked her brief gentle smile.

He unwrapped his revolver from the oiled rags that protected it. The revolver was a single-action Bisley model with a 7½-inch barrel, caliber .45 Long Colt. It had been designed for match target competition and the Colt people had named it after the shooting range at Bisley in England where marksmen met every year to decide the championship.

The man put the revolver in his waistband and snugged it around until it didn't abrade his hipbone.

On his way to the door he glanced at the woman. She was, he thought, a woman of rare quality. When he'd met her she'd been working in a brothel in Leadville. After they'd known each other a few years the man had said, "We're both getting kind of long in the tooth," and they'd both left their previous occupations and gone out together looking for gold.

At the door he said, "I'll be back directly," and walked down toward the cliff.

He covered the distance briskly; it took some 15 minutes and when he reached the mouth of the tunnel he ran the empty ore cart out past the sluice and pushed it up onto a little hump of rocky ground. In the debris of the tailings dump he found two

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cracked half-gallon jugs they'd discarded. He set the jugs on two corners of the ore cart; they balanced sturdily and nothing short of a direct blow would knock them off.

Then he walked back up toward the fort, but he moved more slowly now, keeping to cover because it wasn't certain just when the approaching horseman would come into sight down along the far end of the base of the mountain.

The man laid up in a clump of manzanita about 30 feet from the veranda and kept his eye on the little stand of cottonwoods a mile away. That was where the creek flowed off the mountain. The creek went underground there but you could trace the line of its passage out onto the desert plain by the deep green row of mesquite and scrub sycamore. The rider would appear somewhere along there; he'd have to cross the creek.

After a little while the visitor came across the creek and rode along the slope toward the ruined fort. *Coming in straight up,* the man observed; but still he didn't show himself.

Halfway up to the house the horseman drew his rifle out of the saddle scabbard and laid it across his pommel, holding it that way with one hand as he approached without hurry.

The man lay in the brush and watched.

He saw that the rider was just a kid. Maybe 18, maybe 20. A leaned-down kid with no meat on him and a hungry narrow face under the brim of a pretentious black hat.

The horse went by not ten feet from the man's hiding place. Just beyond, the kid drew rein, not riding any closer to the fort.

"Hello the house. Anybody home?"

The man stood up behind him. "Right back here. Drop the rifle first. Then we'll talk."

The man was braced for anything; the kid might be a wild one. The man had the Bisley Colt cocked in his fist. The kid's head turned slowly until he picked up the man in the corner of his vision; evidently he saw and recognized the revolver because he let the rifle slide to the ground.

"Now the belt gun," the man said, and the kid stripped off his gunbelt and let it drop alongside the rifle. The kid eased his horse off to one side away from the weapons and the man said, "All right, you can speak your piece."

"Ain't rightly fair coming up from behind me like that," the kid said. He had a surprisingly deep voice.

"Well you came calling on me with a rifle across your saddle-

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bow."

"Place like this, how do I know what to expect? Could be rattlers in there. Place could be crawling with road agents for all I know."

"Well, that's all right, son. You won't need your weapons. You want to come inside and share a bit of supper?"

The kid looked uncertainly at the man's Bisley revolver. The man walked over to the discarded weapons and picked them up. Then he uncocked the revolver and put it back in his waistband. He went up to the house and the woman came out onto the veranda and shaded her eyes to look at the visitor. She smiled a welcome, but when she glanced at the man he saw the knowledge in her face.

The kid had come to kill the man, right enough. All three of them knew it, but nobody said anything.

The kid ate politely; somebody had taught him manners. The woman said, to make conversation, "You hail from Tucson?"

"No, ma'am. Laramie, Wyoming."

"Long way off," the man said.

"I reckon."

After supper the three of them sat on the veranda. The sun was behind the house and they were in shadow; another ten minutes to sundown. The hard slanting light struck the face of Longshot Bluff and made the spire look like a fiery signal against the dark sky beyond it. The man got his pipe going to his satisfaction, broke the match, and contemplated the kid who had come to kill him. "How much they paying you for my scalp, son?"

"What?"

"The last one they sent, it was two thousand dollars they offered him."

"Mister, I ain't quite sure what you're talking about."

"That's a powerful grudge they're carrying, two thousand dollars' worth. It happened a long while back, you know."

The woman said, "But I suppose two thousand dollars looks like the world of money to a young man like you."

The man said, "It's not legal any more, you know, son. No matter what they told you. There was a fugitive warrant out on me from the state of Wyoming, but that was some years back. The statute of limitations expired three years ago."

"I'm sorry, mister, I just ain't tracking what you mean."

"The cattlemen up there were hiring range detectives like me to

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discourage homesteaders," the man explained. "This one cattleman had an eager kind of streak in him. I told him to keep out of the way but he had to mess in things. Got in the way of a bullet. My bullet, I expect, although I've never been whole certain about that.

"Anyhow, that cattleman's been in a wheelchair ever since. Accused me of backshooting him, said I'd sold out to the homestead crowd. It wasn't true, of course, but it's what he believes. All he does is sit in that wheelchair and brood over it. He's sent seven bounty men after me, one time or another. He just keeps sending them. Reckon he won't give it up till one of us dies of old age. You're number eight now. Maybe you want to think on that—think about the other seven that came after me, pretty good professionals some of them. I'm still here, son."

The kid just watched him, not blinking, no longer protesting innocence.

The man said, "That fellow in the wheelchair, how much did he offer you?"

The kid didn't answer that. After a moment the woman said, "You probably want the money for some good purpose, don't you, young fellow?"

"Ma'am, I expect anybody could find his own good purpose to turn money to if he had it."

"You got a girl back in Laramie, Wyoming?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Fixing to marry her?"

"That's right, ma'am."

"On two thousand dollars you'd have a right good start," she said.

"That would be true, ma'am," the kid said with great courtesy.

"Well, I hope you make your way proper in the world," she said, "but you ain't likely to do that here. You do a sight of hunting, I imagine, from the look of that rifle you carry. You must have seen buck antelope square off a time or two. The young buck tries to get the better of the old buck, tries to displace him in the herd. Rarely happens. I expect you know that. The old buck knows all the tricks that the young buck still needs to learn. That's why you're setting on this porch now without a gun."

The man's pipe had gone out. He struck another match and indulged himself in the ritual of spreading the flame around the bowl. Then he said, "If you ain't ready to give it up, son, I'll take

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your weapons out there on the desert in the morning and then let you go out and get them and we'll finish this thing between us. If that's the way you want it."

The kid looked at him and uncertainty crept into his young face.

The man said, "The only weapon I own is this Bisley revolver here. Of course you may think you can outrange me with that forty-four-forty rifle of yours. You may think that, but I reckon as how you'd be mistaken."

The light was beginning to fade, but he still had another 15 or 20 minutes of light good enough for shooting. The wind had died; that was what he had waited for. He went inside the house and got the kid's rifle and brought it out onto the veranda. The kid watched him while the man worked the lever-action, jacking out the cartridges one by one until the rifle was empty.

Then the man picked up one of the cartridges off the floor and wiped it clean with his hand and chambered it into the rifle. He locked the breech shut and looked at the kid.

"Now I've put one load into this rifle of yours. I'm going to let you shoot it, if you like, but not at me. You can aim it down there toward the cliff. If I see that rifle start to swing toward me I'll just have to shoot you."

The kid, baffled, just stared at him.

The man pointed off toward the cliff. You could see the little ore cart down there; you could, if you had good eyesight, make out the two jugs perched on it.

"You see those jugs on the ore cart, son?"

"Yes, sir, if that's what they are."

"Half-gallon clay jugs. You think you can hit those with that rifle?"

The kid stood up and went to the rail of the veranda. He peered down the slope. "That's an awful long way off," he said, half to himself.

"Pret' near half a mile," the man agreed. "Six, seven hundred yards anyhow."

The kid said, "I don't know as how even Wild Bill Hickok could have made a shot like that, sir."

"Well, you can try it if you like."

"I don't see the point."

The man handed the rifle to the woman. Then he drew out his Bisley revolver and stepped over to the pillar that supported the

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veranda roof.

"I'll show you why," he said, and lifted his left arm straight out from the shoulder and braced his palm against the pillar. Then he twisted his body a little and set his feet firm, and holding the Bisley revolver in his right fist he lowered it until his two wrists were crossed, the left one supporting the right one—the shooter's-rest position. He cocked the revolver and fired it once, almost with careless speed.

Down below at the cliff all three of them plainly saw one of the clay jugs hurtle off its perch on the corner of the ore cart. The jug struck the rocky ground and shattered.

The kid's eyes, big and round, came around slowly to rest on the man. "Lordy. Seven hundred yards—with a *handgun*?"

The man cocked his Bisley revolver again and held it in his right hand pointed more or less at the kid. The woman walked behind the kid and held the rifle out over the railing, pointing it toward the cliff. She was proffering it to the kid. "Go ahead," she said. "You try."

Slowly the kid took the rifle from her. He was careful to make no sudden motions. He got down on one knee and braced his left forearm against the porch railing to steady his aim. He took his time. The man saw him look up toward the sky, trying to judge the elevation and the windage and the range. The kid adjusted the rear sight of the rifle twice before he snugged down to take serious aim.

Finally he was ready and the man saw the kid's finger begin to whiten on the trigger as he squeezed. The kid was all right, the man thought. Knew what he was doing. But then that had been clear from the start—when the kid hadn't tried something foolish at the moment when the man had taken him by surprise back there on the horse. The kid was wise enough to know you didn't fight when the other man had the drop.

The kid squeezed the trigger with professionally unhurried skill and the rifle thundered. The man was watching the cliff and saw the white streak appear on the rocks where the bullet struck.

"Not bad," the man said. "You only missed by about ten feet."

"Lordy," the kid said. He handed the empty rifle back to the woman.

Then the man took his position again and fired a single shot from his Bisley revolver.

They saw the remaining jug shatter.

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The light began to fade. The man said, "I did that to show you the first one wasn't a fluke."

The kid swallowed. "I expect I'm kind of overmatched." He wiped his mouth. "I take it right kindly you did it this way. I mean you could've proved the same thing by using me instead of those jugs." He sat down slowly. "You was right. But that old man in the wheelchair, he showed me a warrant. He said it was all fair and legal. He even showed me where it said dead-or-alive."

The woman said, "Likely he didn't show you the date on that warrant, though, did he?"

"I don't recollect that he did, no, ma'am."

The man said, "If you ask at the courthouse when you get home you'll find out those charges expired three years ago."

In the morning they watched the kid ride away to the north. The man packed his Bisley revolver away after he cleaned it. Then he took the woman's hand and they went down to the cliff to start the day's work.

The man picked up the shards of the broken jugs and tossed them on the tailings pile. "It's a good thing he's that young. If he'd been older he'd have known for a fact that you just can't make a shot that far with a handgun. But a fellow that young, you can trick him because he believes what he sees."

The woman smiled. "Well, it wasn't exactly a trick. You still had to aim rock-steady. And figure the wind."

"I waited until there wasn't no wind. If the air's moving you can't do a trick like that."

He'd set up for it four years ago because he'd known they'd keep coming after him. He'd been counting on the statute of limitations; he hadn't reckoned, at the time, on that old man being so obsessed that he'd keep sending bounty men forever. But the trick still worked.

He'd done it by figuring the shot in reverse. He'd made a little notch on the pillar of the veranda and that was where he aimed the revolver from. He'd taken aim at the left side of the spire on top of Longshot Bluff. Then he'd taken aim at the right side of it. Then he'd gone down the hill and marked the spots where the two bullets had struck. After that, all he had to do was set up his two targets on exactly those spots. If there wasn't any wind, all you had to do was aim at one side of the spire or the other. You'd hit the same spots every time.

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It had fooled the kid, of course, because it hadn't occurred to the kid that there was a fixed aiming point. The kid had had to guess the drop of his bullet over a seven-hundred-yard range. He'd guessed pretty close, matter of fact, but it hadn't been close enough.

The man was pleased with it. Because all the time he'd been a gun-handler by profession he'd managed to do it without ever killing a man. He'd arrested a lot of them and he'd shot a few, but none of them fatally. He wasn't about to let a bitter old fool in a wheelchair make a killer out of him at this time of his life.

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a *NEW* detective story by

STEPHEN WASYLYK

There is something appealing about two septuagenarian snoops who still have all their wits about them—well, nearly all. Mr. Morley and Mr. Bakov, 75-year-old residents of the Golden Age Retirement Center, Inc., prove that the name of the Center is a contradiction. True, the senior-citizen sleuths are in their Golden Age, but where the detection of crime is concerned, they are far from retirement. As we said to begin with, there is something appealing about two old-timer 'tecs . . .

THE DEATH OF THE BAG MAN

by STEPHEN WASYLYK

In spite of the cheery rays of the rising sun slanting through the windows, a pall seemed to hang over the first-to-breakfast residents in the dining room of the Golden Age Retirement Center, Inc., destroying their appetites and causing them to pick at their food despondently.

Even Morley and Bakov were affected. Morley's newspaper lay untouched alongside his plate, his eggs and toast growing cold as Morley sipped at his coffee unhappily; and Bakov spooned up his oatmeal slowly, without his usual complaint about his diet.

Bakov put down his spoon with a sigh. "It is a terrible thing, Morley," he said. "What are we to do?"

"I do not know, Bakov," said Morley, his face sober. "When they raised the rates last time, we captured the bank robber and the bank gave us a reward, but I do not think we can go out and capture a criminal this time, even though the city has many criminals who should be captured. We must think, Bakov. Surely there must be a way for each of us to earn the few dollars that

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are necessary. Although we are seventy-five, we must be good for something."

Bakov passed a chubby hand over his bald head carefully, as if not to disarrange the hair that was no longer there. "That is true. We are not senile or stupid. But I do not see how poor Miss McIlhenny will manage. She stayed awake in the recreation room all night watching the old movies on the TV as usual because she is afraid to go to sleep because she thinks she will die, but this time she cried and she is still crying. Where can she go and what can she do? She is eighty-two and not well."

Morley rose, his gaily patterned Hawaiian shirt hanging loosely from his bony shoulders, his bushy gray hair haloed by the slanting rays of the morning sun. "There are others also, Bakov, but it is as the Director says. The Center must pay the bills or it will go bankrupt and then there will be no Center at all for anyone. But what the Director does not understand is why no one will give him the money. He has been everywhere and seen everyone. They will not help, even though it is really not a large amount."

Morley tucked his newspaper under his arm. "But . . ." He shrugged. "We have yet a week, Bakov. We will sit in our deck chairs and think as we watch the men destroying the apartment building across the street. Perhaps I will get a brilliant idea. I am good at getting brilliant ideas."

For more than a week workmen had been gutting the gracious old building across the street, sending debris down long wooden chutes to waiting dump trucks. Now that phase was over. A shell of marble and brick was all that remained, and rows of black rectangles that had once been windows stared at Morley and Bakov like vacant eyes that presaged death.

"It is a terrible thing to destroy such a fine building," said Bakov.

"Nothing lasts forever," said Morley pompously.

"Some things," said Bakov. "Just the other night on the television I saw the things in the Egypt that they call the Pyramids. They have lasted for a long time."

"It is simple, Bakov. In Egypt there is not enough progress because there are not yet many cars. Some day the Egypts will all own cars like people in America and they will tear down the Pyramids to make a shopping center with a big parking lot."

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The demolition crew had erected a plywood wall well out from the base of the building, closing off the sidewalk and part of the street to protect passersby, leaving only an opening at each end so that the trucks could pull in and out. Now one of the men appeared in the near opening, shouting and waving his hard hat, and the other men ran toward him, all disappearing inside.

"Aha," said Morley. "Something is wrong."

One of the men reappeared in the opening and ran into the street, looking one way and then another. He spotted a police car that had parked to one side, either because the two officers had been assigned to the demolition or they were as interested as everyone else in seeing the building come crashing down. The man darted toward the police car, spoke to the driver, and in a few minutes all three ran into the building.

Morley leaped to his feet, his hair bristling, his shirt flapping. "Something has happened, Bakov. Let us go see."

"No," said Bakov. "Always when you go see, we get into trouble."

"What trouble can there be in an empty building?"

"Wherever the police go, there is trouble."

"Then stay, Bakov. I will go alone." Morley started down the broad lawn toward the gate in the wrought-iron fence.

Bakov watched, sighed, then heaved his bulk from his deck chair and followed, muttering to himself, "If I do not go, he will get into trouble. If I go, he will still get into trouble, and I also. So why do I go?" He lumbered across the lawn after Morley, both of them moving rapidly in spite of their age, and they crossed the street together.

They stopped at the opening in the plywood wall, peered inside, and saw nothing except a debris-littered sidewalk.

"Come on," said Morley.

Bakov nervously peered upward. "A brick will fall on my poor head."

Morley cocked his head, listening to the approach of police sirens, blue eyes sparkling with excitement. "Listen," he said. "More police are coming."

"Then I am going," said Bakov.

Morley took his arm and pulled him with him as he crossed the sidewalk. "They can only tell us to leave," he said. "By that time we will have seen what is wrong."

They went through the doorless opening that once had been the

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main entrance. The lobby was now a gloomy cavity illuminated only by daylight filtering through the entrance. The demolition men were gathered around the two policemen, one of whom was taking notes. Beyond the group lay what appeared to be a large bundle of rags.

Morley identified it first, clutching Bakov's arm fiercely. "It is a man, Bakov!" he whispered.

He sidled forward almost to the body when one of the policemen yelled, "Hey! Get away from there!"

Morley stepped back, his eyes still on the body, his brow furrowed.

Bakov moved aside quickly as several men came through the door, led by a heavyset man with close-cropped hair who stopped when he saw Morley, lifted an arm with index finger pointing at the doorway, and said, "Get out!"

Morley drew himself up, his shoulders squared. "Do not speak so to a private citizen who has committed no crime."

Arm still extended, finger pointed, the man repeated, "*Out*!"

"You will be sorry," said Morley. He motioned to Bakov. "Come," he said. "When Lieutenant Hook cannot find the murderer, as usual, perhaps he will speak to us nicely and then we will decide to help."

An internal pressure seemed to make Hook swell a little. "*OUT*!" he said.

Morley moved toward the door, stopping the moment Hook's attention left him.

"All right," said Hook to the policeman. "Let's have it."

"One of the demolition men was giving the building a final check," said the policeman. "He found the body and called us. No one has been near it except me. I could see someone shot the man in the chest and he was dead, so I kept everyone away."

Hook motioned to one of his men.

The detective went through the dead man's pockets. "No identification," he said, rising to his feet. "The last time that coat was pressed was during the Lyndon Johnson administration. The shirt and pants are two sizes too big and came out of a ragbag somewhere. He doesn't have any socks and I don't know what holds the shoes together."

"How old?" asked Hook.

"Hard to say. Late fifties, early sixties."

"Some old bum or wino, I guess," said Hook.

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The detective shook his head. "I think not. Looks more like an old guy down on his luck."

Hook raised his voice. "Does anyone know this man?"

Morley stepped out of the shadows. "He is the Bag Man," he said.

Hook whirled. "I thought I told you to get out."

Morley's eyebrows arched. "And if I had gone, who would answer your question? I tell you, he is the Bag Man."

"The what?"

Morley spoke as if Hook were a child. "The Bag Man. He walks the streets with a big brown cloth bag over his shoulder and sometimes he asks the people who pass if they will give him a quarter. Bakov and I watched him many times and we were curious, so one day we crossed the street and talked to him because no one else paid attention. They just pushed him aside and we felt sorry for him. I asked him what he was doing and he smiled and said he was looking for help and did I have a quarter. I explained I did not have a quarter and neither did Bakov, but if he was hungry he could come into the Center and be our guest at the mid-morning tea time, which he did."

"He was not hungry," said Bakov. "He gave me his little sandwiches."

"You took a bum into the Center?" asked Hook.

"What bum? He was a poor old man asking for quarters, so we gave him tea instead."

"What did he carry in the bag?" asked Hook.

"I do not pry," said Morley loftily.

"I do not think it was money," said Bakov, "or it would not be necessary for him to ask for quarters."

Hook looked from one to the other. "Tell me," he said carefully, "did it occur to either of you to ask his name?"

"Of course," said Morley. "Were we to call him Mr. Bag Man? He said his name was Chaucer Galinsoga."

Hook blinked. "He must have made it up. No one could be named Chaucer Galinsoga."

"It is indeed a strange name," said Bakov, "but a policeman once told me your name is Ironhead Hook, which is also a strange name although not as strange as Chaucer Galinsoga."

Hook glared at him. "Did he tell you where he lived?"

"No," said Morley. "He said only that the Center was a fine place and we were lucky, which we already knew."

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"What else did he say?"

"He did not say much," said Bakov. "He was too busy writing in his little book."

Hook almost yelled. "What little book?"

"The little book he kept in his coat pocket," said Morley.

Hook turned to the detective who had gone through the dead man's pockets. The detective shrugged. "No book," he said.

Hook folded his arms. "Tell me something," he said to Morley and Bakov. "You take an old bum in off the street because you feel sorry for him, you give him tea and sandwiches which he doesn't eat because he isn't hungry although he is asking people for quarters, he asks you questions and he writes the answers in a little notebook while he tells you very little of himself. Did it occur to either of you that this was a little unusual?"

"Of course," said Morley. "Because we are old, we are not stupid. He said he was writing a book."

Hook's voice rose. "An old bum with no socks was writing a book?"

"I am not a writer but I know one does not require socks to write a book," said Morley patiently. "Perhaps he did not like to wear socks, but that is not important. I have told you that he carried a brown cloth bag always, but there is no bag here." His eyes scanned the dark recesses of the lobby. "Where can the bag be?"

"The bag won't be here," said Hook. "The man was killed elsewhere and his body brought here." He pointed. "You can see where it was dragged across the floor through the brick and plaster dust."

"It is very clever of you to puzzle that out," said Morley admiringly. He stiffened suddenly, his eyes bright. "The car! It was the car!"

"What car?" asked Hunt.

"The car I saw last night," said Morley.

Hook's eyes narrowed. He thought for a moment, then took Morley and Bakov by the arms. "There is too much confusion here," he said. "Let's go across the street and talk about this."

At an outdoor table on the quiet patio Hook produced his notebook and held his pen expectantly. "Now tell me about the car."

Morley cleared his throat. "We were all upset at the Center

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yesterday. Many found difficulty in sleeping, I among them, so I looked out the window and thought about our problem. From the window it is possible to see the front of the building across the street. Naturally I saw no person because only fools, criminals, and policemen walk on the street at that hour.

"Then a car came. It stopped and the driver made it go backward to the wooden fence the building wreckers put up so that the innocent people would not be hit on the head by a falling brick. Then the headlights went out. I could see nothing more because it is dark there. After a few minutes the car drove away again and I went to sleep because I did not consider the car important."

"What kind of car was it?" asked Hook.

Morley shrugged. "Who can tell? Do they not all look alike these days?"

"Could you at least see the color?" asked Hook. "Was it light or dark?"

"In the dark it was dark and in the light it was light," said Morley testily. "It was no color." He scratched his nose gently and his eyes twinkled as he glanced at Bakov. "It does not matter. I have already solved the crime for you."

Hook leaned back. "Tell me," he said tightly.

"The Bag Man was writing a book," said Morley. "Obviously it was a book about the graft and the corruption in the city of which everyone already knows but can prove nothing, but the Bag Man had the proof in his book that the Mayor does not work for the people but for the greedy gangsters, so it is necessary that the greedy gangsters steal his book and destroy him, for which they hire an evil hit person who shoots the Bag Man and takes his body to the empty building because he thinks they will knock the building down on top of the poor Bag Man and destroy the evidence of the crime. You see? It is necessary only for you to go to the Mayor and demand that he confess and then crime will be solved because the Mayor will tell the names of his greedy friends."

Bakov nodded. "That is true. All the famous detectives on the television have solved this crime many times. The only thing that is different is how the evil hit person pays for his crime. Sometimes the evil hit person's car goes over a big cliff and explodes."

His face solemn, Morley nodded at Hook. "So you see, you have

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only to go demand that the Mayor tell you who is responsible."

Hook's face seemed to have swelled and acquired a tinge of purple.

Morley looked at him closely. "I think perhaps you have the high blood pressure like Bakov."

Hook slammed his notebook closed and put it in his pocket.

Morley's voice held laughter. "Do not be so angry. Bakov and I were only making a joke. We know that such a crime is only for the television." He shook his head. "I do not know who killed the Bag Man."

Hook made an effort to smile. He took a deep breath. "At least I am pleased to hear you will not interfere this time."

"I will not interfere," said Morley. "Bakov and I have other problems and we cannot help you."

Hook's eyes rolled up. He mumbled a few words gratefully and left.

"Come, Bakov," said Morley. "It has occurred to me that I have not yet read my morning newspaper and there are many jobs advertised there for people who would like to work. We will look at them. Perhaps we will find something."

"I do not think anyone would advertise a job for two seventy-five-year-old men," said Bakov.

"We will lie about our age," said Morley. "We will tell them we are only sixty."

Across the street the demolition proceedings had been suspended for the day to preserve the scene of the crime and Morley occupied himself in reading each little ad in the Help Wanted section. Finished, he sighed.

"There is nothing, Bakov. Perhaps there will be others tomorrow."

He began turning the pages, scanning the headlines, when he stopped, adjusted his glasses, and bent forward.

"That is strange, Bakov," he said, pointing. "Here on the page that tells of the parties of the rich people, I see the name Mrs. Galinsoga. I wonder if she could be a relation of Chaucer Galinsoga, the Bag Man."

"The Bag Man was poor," said Bakov. "How could he be the relation of someone rich?"

Morley folded the paper slowly. "But he was strange, Bakov. He was writing a book even if he had no socks. Perhaps he was a rich man in disguise."

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"Rich men do not write books," said Bakov. "They are too busy being rich."

"It is a strange coincidence," said Morley. "Perhaps we should go talk to this Mrs. Galinsoga."

"We do not know where she lives," Bakov pointed out.

"The phone book will give us the address," said Morley. He stood up and dropped the paper into the deck chair. "I am interested in this, Bakov. Let us go investigate."

"Let Lieutenant Hook investigate."

"Hook is not too bright a person, Bakov. Already we have found it necessary three times to help him catch a murderer. Let us go."

"I do not wish to go."

"The paper calls her the beautiful Mrs. Galinsoga."

"Rich ladies are always beautiful," said Bakov. "Never once have I seen the newspapers call a rich woman ugly, even though there are just as many ugly rich people as there are poor ones and I have met many beautiful women. What is one more?"

Morley pointed at him. "You are truly getting old, Bakov."

Without a word Bakov stood up, tried to pull in his bulging stomach, patted his nonexistent hair, and brushed off his sleeves. "For what do you wait, Morley?" he asked.

They located the address and reached it by a combination of free rides for senior citizens on bus routes that took them across the city to the suburbs, where they found the numbers and the name *Galinsoga* on a brass plate fastened to a head-high stone wall pierced by a driveway. They followed the driveway through a stand of trees until they saw the house itself, a handsome combination of dark-brown brick and peaked roofs surrounded by tailored shrubbery.

To one side of the house the driveway flared out into an apron before a garage. Three cars were parked there; a foreign-made light-green station wagon, a two-seater off-white sports car, and a metallic gray Mercedes sedan.

A small thin man, no bigger than Morley, his gray hair cut short and his clothes protected by white coveralls, was industriously running a cloth over the hood of the Mercedes.

"The tradesmen's entrance is in the rear," he said.

"We are not members of a union," said Morley. "We are here to see Mrs. Galinsoga." He peered into the windows of the sedan. "Is this the car of Mrs. Galinsoga?"

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The man pointed at the two-seater. "That is Mrs. Galinsoga's. This one belongs to Mr. Galinsoga."

"Her husband?"

"No. Her brother-in-law." The man placed his hands on his hips. "What do you want, anyway?"

"Do not be rude," said Morley, "or I will tell Mr. Galinsoga you have missed a big spot on his car and he might wish to hire a younger man whose eyes are better."

They left the man polishing carefully and went up to the front door where Morley pushed the bell.

A pretty, dark-haired young woman in a black uniform with a white apron opened the door and frowned. "You two can't be selling subscriptions."

"We wish only to speak to Mrs. Galinsoga about Mr. Chaucer Galinsoga," said Morley.

She held the door wide. "Come in."

The room in which the young woman asked them to wait was low-ceilinged, the walls were lined with books, the furniture was leather-covered, soft, and grouped around a huge fireplace.

A tall slim woman about 40, with brown wavy hair framing a delicate, aristocratic face, entered the room, concern in her eyes. The fingers of one hand pulled nervously at the neck of her soft pullover as she looked from one to the other. "I am Mrs. Galinsoga," she said. "You have news of my husband?"

Morley's eyes were puzzled. "Perhaps there are two Chaucer Galinsogas. I speak of the one who does not shave and wears old clothes and shoes but no socks and carried a brown cloth bag, which is hard to believe of a man married to such a beautiful rich woman."

"That is true," said Bakov. "He would at least have socks if he was *your* Mr. Chaucer Galinsoga."

"Then you have seen him," said Mrs. Galinsoga excitedly. "You see, Chaucer is a professor of sociology at the university but he is writing a book on the socio-economic difficulties of our senior citizens, so he dresses in old clothing every few days and goes into the city to experience the problems from a personal viewpoint. He feels it is necessary to study the subject first-hand." She waved at the room. "Obviously, he could get no feeling for the matter here."

"What did she say, Morley?" whispered Bakov.

"I think the Bag Man was writing a book about old people who have no money," said Morley.

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"That would indeed be a very thick book," said Bakov.

Morley shifted uncomfortably. "I do not know why the police have not already told you. I am very sorry but Mr. Chaucer Galinsoga of the old clothes and no socks has been murdered."

Mrs. Galinsoga gave a little scream and covered her face with her hands.

A middle-aged man with full iron-gray hair and a square face came into the room.

Mrs. Galinsoga wailed, "Oh, Jeffrey," and collapsed on his chest, her tears wetting the lapel of his tweed jacket.

The man looked over her head at Morley. "What is this?"

The woman looked up. "They say that Chaucer has been murdered."

"Nonsense," snapped the man. "I just reported him missing to the police. They would have told me."

"The police have many departments," said Morley. "Who are you?"

"Jeffrey Galinsoga. Chaucer is my brother."

"And are you also a professor?"

"We are both professors of sociology. Suppose you tell me what this is all about."

Morley explained.

Mrs. Galinsoga wailed, "I told him it was dangerous to walk around the city like that, but he insisted."

The doorbell rang. Morley heard the door open and then the maid led Hook and a detective into the room. Hook stopped short and glared at Morley and Bakov.

"Why are you so late?" demanded Morley. "It was necessary for me to tell Mrs. Galinsoga and the Bag Man's brother everything. It remains only for you to question them."

Hook pointed at the door. "Get out!"

"We will go," said Morley. He turned to Mrs. Galinsoga. "I am sorry about your poor husband. He was a nice man."

The pretty young maid stood in the entrance hall, obviously eavesdropping. Her chin lifted and she looked at Morley defiantly. "I want to hear what the policeman says."

"Do not worry about the policeman," said Morley. "I will tell you all about the crime. Let us go into the kitchen."

Bakov brightened. "I like kitchens."

"Are you hungry?" asked the young woman.

"He is always hungry because the diet person at the Center will

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not allow him to eat what he wants to eat," explained Morley. "Your kitchen is for talking, not eating."

They sat at a small table while Morley told the maid what he knew.

"What is your name?" asked Morley.

"Sue Ann," said the young woman.

"You live here?"

"Of course. So does the cook, but she is off today."

Bakov sighed. "That is just my luck."

Sue Ann went to a sideboard and came back with a bowl of fruit. "Take your choice," she said. "It is good for you and will not hurt your diet." She patted Bakov's bald head. "My grandfather has the same problem."

Bakov beamed. "You are a fine young person." He selected three bananas, placing one in each shirt pocket and peeling the third.

"Was last night the first time Mr. Galinsoga did not come home?" asked Morley.

"Oh, he was home," she said. "He came in about eight when Mrs. Galinsoga was upstairs dressing for the party. He went directly to the den. I brought him a sandwich and a cup of coffee. Then his brother came in to pick up Mrs. Galinsoga and take her to the party, which he often does because Mr. Galinsoga has been busy with his book for months. The two men talked until Mrs. Galinsoga came down. She and the brother left about nine, shortly before I did." She smiled. "I had a date."

"Was Mr. Chaucer Galinsoga wearing his old clothes?"

She nodded.

Morley frowned. "That is indeed strange. If Mr. Chaucer Galinsoga was working in his den at nine, how then did he end up murdered in the empty apartment building?"

Bakov peeled his second banana. "That is a good question, Morley, but as you told Lieutenant Hook, there was the car."

"That is true," said Morley thoughtfully. He rose to his feet and paced the kitchen slowly. He stopped. "Aha," he said. He resumed pacing, stopping once again. "*Aha*," he said, more loudly this time. He went back to his pacing, coming to a sudden halt with his arm thrust into the air. "*AHA*!" he said.

"What is this *Aha*?" asked Bakov.

"Come, Bakov," said Morley.

"I have not finished my banana," said Bakov.

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"Eat while you walk," said Morley.

He led them back to the library where Lieutenant Hook and the detective were still questioning Mrs. Galinsoga and the murdered man's brother, the four of them standing in front of the fireplace.

"I thought I told you to leave," snapped Hook.

Morley held up a hand. "I would like only to ask a few questions, which will not bother anyone."

"Let him ask," said Mrs. Galinsoga. "He was nice enough to come here and tell me about poor Chaucer."

"When you and Mr. Jeffrey Galinsoga came home from the party, was Mr. Chaucer Galinsoga in his den?" asked Morley.

She shook her head. "The den was dark. I assumed he had gone to bed."

"Would you not know this when you also went to bed?"

"We had separate bedrooms," she said. "Naturally, I would not disturb him and I didn't know he was gone until this morning."

Morley scratched his nose reflectively and then pointed at the couple. "Arrest them!" he said to Hook.

"What for?" asked Hook.

"Together they killed Mr. Chaucer Galinsoga."

"That's ridiculous!" said Mrs. Galinsoga.

"No," said Morley. "I will explain. It is called the love triangle. Mr. Jeffrey Galinsoga and Mrs. Galinsoga were lovers and they wished to get rid of Mr. Chaucer Galinsoga, so they came home from the party and murdered the poor man and took his body to the empty building so the building would fall on top of him and conceal the crime."

Mrs. Galinsoga's eyes were wide. "Jeffrey and I?"

"Of course," said Morley. "Did you not go out often with Jeffrey Galinsoga to parties? Did you and your husband not have separate bedrooms? Is it to be believed that Jeffrey Galinsoga could associate with such a beautiful rich woman and not have romantic feelings? Is it to be believed that because your husband was always busy that you would not turn to Jeffrey Galinsoga in your loneliness?"

"You are a ludicrous old man," said Jeffrey Galinsoga. "The wild fantasies emanating from your senile brain are hardly amusing. There is not one single fact to justify your conjecture."

"There is the car," said Morley. "Your car—the metallic gray one. A car of such a color is dark in the dark and light in the light and of no color at all. Lieutenant Hook has only to take it to

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the building when it gets dark while I look out my window as I did last night and I will identify it as the same car, which means that you took the body of your poor brother to the building."

Jeffrey Galinsoga's face paled. With one quick movement he threw Mrs. Galinsoga into Hook and the detective, all three collapsing, whirled, and sprinted for the front door.

Only Bakov was in the way, his partly consumed banana halfway to his lips. Galinsoga thrust Bakov aside, the banana arching gracefully through the air, and, in one of those freak accidents that can never be duplicated deliberately, the banana landed on the floor a split second before Galinsoga's heel came down on the same spot, and Jeffrey Galinsoga gave an excellent imitation of an overweight Peter Pan before crashing to the floor.

Bakov looked down at him ruefully. "He has ruined my good banana," he said.

Morley and Bakov settled into their deck chairs after dinner for a breath of fresh air before joining the other residents in front of the big color TV in the recreation room.

"I wonder if Lieutenant Hook is still angry," said Bakov.

"I do not understand Lieutenant Hook," said Morley. "Did I not solve the crime as usual and did you not capture the criminal with your banana?"

"He said you almost blew it," said Bakov. "I do not know what that means."

"It means only that I was wrong about the love triangle," said Morley. "Mrs. Galinsoga loved her husband dearly, even if he did not wear socks. Does it matter instead that Jeffrey Galinsoga killed his brother because he said his brother stole his idea of a book about old people with no money? For many months Jeffrey had been making notes but it was his brother who had the idea of pretending to be an old person with no money to see what it was really like, so he became the Bag Man, walking the streets and talking to old people as if he was one of them, and Jeffrey Galinsoga knew that such a book would be better than his.

"Could I know that while Mrs. Galinsoga was upstairs, Jeffrey demanded that his brother stop because the book about old people was really his idea, but his brother refused? Also, could I know that Jeffrey took Mrs. Galinsoga to the party but sneaked out and came back and murdered his brother because he was angry and jealous, and that he then placed the Bag Man in the

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trunk of his car and went back to the party to bring Mrs. Galinsoga home?"

"It was not very nice of him to drive around with Mrs. Galinsoga while her poor husband's body was in the trunk."

"Jeffrey Galinsoga was not a nice person or he would not have murdered his brother over a book about old people with no money because there are enough old people with no money for everybody. But it was obvious that only he could drive into the city to dispose of the body. I did not see how he could do this without Mrs. Galinsoga's knowing, so I thought she also was guilty. When Jeffrey Galinsoga saw the empty building he thought that would be an excellent place, but he could not know I was looking out the window, and even Lieutenant Hook said that if I had not seen the car it would have been very difficult to prove that Jeffrey Galinsoga was guilty."

He shook his head. "Lieutenant Hook has only a little imagination for a homicide person. He sent his men to check the records of the Social Security and the Welfare to find where Chaucer Galinsoga lived instead of looking in the phone book as any sensible person would do, which was why you and I had to tell Mrs. Galinsoga her husband had been murdered."

"Mrs. Galinsoga is not only rich and beautiful, but a nice person," said Bakov. "She forgave you for saying she killed her husband."

"Her husband told her so many stories of old people with no money he had met, she feels she must now take the pages he had written and his notes and finish his book."

"I do not see how she can do this," said Bakov. "She is not a professor of the sociology with no socks."

"It is simple, Bakov. Did I not say that we were good for something? I explained to her she requires the assistance of two intelligent old people such as us, because who knows better what should be in such a book? So she said we will be her consultants and she will pay generously for our valuable experience. We will then give the money to the Director and no one will have to leave the Center, including Miss McIlhenny." Morley smiled. "The dead Mr. Galinsoga would be very happy to know of this."

Bakov sat upright. "Is this true, Morley?"

"Of course. I would not lie about such a thing."

"I did not hear her say this. Where was I?"

Morley sighed. "In the kitchen with Sue Ann, eating a banana."

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

During the long hot summer the pattern of life in the house next door gradually revealed itself—"it was one long, articulate, self-sustaining argument." Lily and Sam, who couldn't help overhearing, were sure somebody was going to get killed one of these days . . .

IN THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR

by ***WILLIAM BANKIER***

"Were they arguing again today?" Lily Norton asked when she arrived home from work at six o'clock.

"Hammer and tongs," Sam Norton said. "Or, rather, breakers and beach. There's something definite in the image of hammer and tongs—the job gets done. But Mercy and Clive will go on pounding against each other forever."

"If she doesn't end up murdering him first."

The Nortons did not even know their neighbors' last name. Clive had come around on the day they moved into the little terrace house six months ago and kindly asked them next door for a drink. Lily and Sam accepted and spent a not very comfortable hour over beer and tea and biscuits discussing local politics, which seemed to be Clive's and Mercy's bag.

They were the steam that drove a civic action group determined to keep down municipal taxes. Determined to prevent truck traffic from using their street. Determined to stop the house on the corner from becoming a hairdressing salon. Determined.

Mercy was large-boned and clear-eyed with old-fashioned hair and a loud voice. Clive was tall and ivory-colored with sparse gray hair. He looked at a person as though he knew dreadful things about him which he was ready to forgive.

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The Nortons repaid that unpromising hospitality by waiting a week and then asking Mercy and Clive in for dessert and coffee after dinner. The session was a little longer but no more rewarding. Host and hostess dredged up conversation about their Canadian origins while the guests refused to be drawn into responses about their childhood in England. They told, instead, about plans to force British Rail to extinguish a bright light high over the Wimbledon yards. It shone into Mercy's bedroom at night and she was determined to be rid of it.

What followed was a tacit agreement that the two couples were not each other's kind of people and that in the future a simple greeting on the street would suffice.

Then summer came, long, hot, unheard-of in England, and windows hung open day and night as the tiny houses gasped for air. And gradually the pattern of life in the house next door was revealed to Sam and Lily; it was one long, articulate, self-sustaining argument. The bickering seemed to have a life of its own and it never ran out of material.

Clive: (*slightly singsong and pedantic*) The bottle was in the refrigerator when I left this morning and now it's on the table, empty.

Mercy: (*rounded tones, the voice of student actress*) I am always very careful to be sure of my facts before I accuse.

Clive: I'm perfectly sure of my facts. There's the bottle. It's empty now, isn't it? You don't seem to understand what I'm trying to tell you.

Mercy: I'm not interested in arguing with you. All I'm trying to say is—

In the kitchen next door Sam would turn down the radio and he and Lily would raise their eyebrows, practically holding their breath. Sometimes the argument was about a third person who was never named.

Clive: He's lying to you, don't you see? He's been pulling the wool over your eyes for years and you let him get away with it.

Mercy: You should try to have a little more trust. It wasn't that way at all. Three of us were in the car at the time. Ask anyone else and see what they say.

Clive: (*mildly hysterical*) Lying and cheating for years but you're too blind to see it. He wouldn't dare do it to me!

Mercy: It has nothing to do with you.

Sometimes the dialogue was like a Harold Pinter play, tantaliz-

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ingly obscure and mined with ominous pauses.

Clive: There were three of them. One was over here, another by the plate, and one was under the counter.

Mercy: I'd rather take his word for that.

Clive: But I tell you I saw the packages in the dustbin. (*pause*) Would you believe me if I showed you the packages?

Mercy: (*a longer pause*) You're the one who leaves it open so they get out in the first place.

Clive: (*ready to kill*) I can *not* seem to *make* you under*stand* that it's a *sim*ple matter of *looking* at the empty *packages*.

The Clive and Mercy dialogues became an important topic of conversation between Sam and Lily. They said it was a deplorable state and they could not understand why two people who so obviously disliked each other did not simply split and go their separate ways.

Sam said, "One thing about it is the way they seem content to keep the argument going, never to resolve it."

"We're never like that," Lily said, helping him make his point.

"Right. If we have a fight, we may say terrible things, but we hate it and we want to get it over with."

"We want to get back to normal."

"Right. But I heard Clive this morning starting up the same subject they were going on about last night."

Sam Norton, writing his radio scripts at home and only driving in to the BBC studios once a week for a recording session, had the advantage of access to the neighbors' private life during the day. Thus he was able to report to Lily over supper.

"I think Clive must be depressed. I heard her say to him today she was tired of his silent self-pity. If he couldn't find a job, there were plenty of things that need doing around the house."

"That's bad." Lily restated her prediction of impending doom. "I'm sure somebody is going to get killed."

And there was no denying, as the Kalahari summer baked the English landscape brown, that a pressure was indeed building up to some sort of violent release in the house next door.

That evening Sam got up and turned down the television sound when the familiar voices began to echo from the brick recess between the houses. He went to stand sideways with one ear to the open louvers of the dining-room window while Lily sat on the living-room sofa, half watching the miming faces on the color screen, half watching her portly husband in the shadows beyond.

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"You'll be lucky to get fifteen thousand for it," Mercy was saying. "You'll be lucky to get twelve thousand." There was a clatter of crockery and a trickle of running water behind her voice. She was cleaning the dishes while arguing. Life had to go on.

"I don't care how much I get. All I know is I can't put up any longer with this constant lack of—" Clive's voice faded as he left the room.

"You were always the one who looked after the insurance," Mercy boomed. "That was never my responsibility."

Fading back in. "You're trying to blame that on me. I showed you the letter and I said this is important."

"You mentioned it once."

"I never said I told you twice. I said this is important. I said—I said—and now you've lost the letter and you're blaming me."

The reference to selling the house must have touched a sensitive fiber in Sam Norton's bundle of insecurity for that night, as he got ready for bed, he said, "I feel sorry for anybody trying to sell a house in England today. There's no market."

"I wish them luck," Lily said brusquely. She was looking at the quarter inch of silver at the roots of her hair; the whole messy coloring business was overdue. In this heat. "I just wish they'd move the hell out of here."

"Well." Sam sat on the edge of the bed and his paunch rested on his thighs. He was going to have to stop with the beer and the peanuts. "I feel a little sorry for the poor guy. He's got her braying down his neck day in and day out."

"Sorry for *him*? If he'd do some of the things he's supposed to do around the house, she wouldn't have to keep after him so much. Have you any idea how long he's been saying he'll paint the living room?"

"She could pitch in and help him, for heaven's sake. It wouldn't break her arm to pick up a paint roller."

"She happens to have a job, Sam. A woman works all day in an office and then comes home and has to wash dishes and clean house, it isn't easy. I'm here to tell you."

Sam felt the mounting pressure in his chest and throat. He worked to keep his voice level. "I don't know. I see pictures of housewives with big happy smiles on their faces, painting walls. In the paint ads in those glossy magazines you keep bringing home at a dollar a copy."

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Lily turned slowly on the vanity stool. "I *like* buying an occasional magazine and I intend to keep on doing it. With the money *I* earn." She narrowed her eyes and the look she gave her husband was pure malevolence. "As for wasting money, when was the last time I had my hair done at Sassoon's where they do it right? Instead I color it myself in the bathroom sink, breaking my back and ruining my nails."

This was dangerous ground for Sam. The image of his wife, aging and going to seed, and the sound of her bitter voice, was confused in his mind with memories of his mother, the angry recluse of his childhood who embarrassed him by looking tired and poor and who frightened him with her screaming tirades. "Big deal," he said. "Lots of women do their own hair and they don't act like bloody martyrs about it."

"Lots of women have husbands who care about how they feel." Lily was struggling with her sense of worthlessness, implanted during a childhood spent with a tyrannical father and a stoical mother who refused to side against him, both parents so proud of two clever sons they had little time for an equally intelligent and much more sensitive daughter. All she wanted was to be told, "Go spend a little money on yourself, you're worth it." But she did not say anything like this. She said, "You're supposed to be a writer but you have no idea of other people's feelings."

Sam, suspecting there was truth in this, began to get ready to flee. He struggled into his trousers, scuffed shoes onto his bare feet, clutching the bureau for support, knocking his plexiglass paperweight to the floor.

"That's right, coward," Lily taunted him. "Run away, run out into the street. Anything to avoid talking." Then, as he said nothing, she came and seized the shirt he was trying to put on.

"Don't prevent me," he groaned, dragging the shirt away and feeling it rip between their hands. He dropped it and took a pullover from the drawer, hauling it over his head, his eyes wild.

"You're not leaving this house," Lily said, her voice cold and flat as ice. "You're going to stay and talk."

"It isn't talking, it's arguing. And you're impossible to argue with."

"You're not leaving." She took his wrist and ground her nails into it, breaking one of them. As she let go, Sam saw little tracks ending in tiny mounds of rolled up skin, the grooves beginning to fill with blood. An overpowering sense of freedom to retaliate

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engulfed him. His foot struck the paperweight and he bent to pick it up, the plexiglass cube fitting well into his fist, the heavy brass base protruding.

Lily saw what he was doing and helped him by cowering in the posture of the victim about to be struck.

Sam Norton brought the weight down seven times in all. The coroner was to say that the first two were enough.

The real estate agent showing prospective buyers through the house avoided mentioning the recent crime of violence in the bedroom. The Norton effects had been taken away and sold while the carpet with the rusty stains on it had been replaced. The affair itself had not been widely publicized, so knowledge of it was not a barrier to sales.

The difficulty in sustaining interest arose when the prospects inevitably inquired about the neighbors. No sooner would the agent finish a testimonial to their civilized behavior than the people next door would begin arguing. It never failed. They seemed to argue ceaselessly.

"She was too good for him," the pedantic singsong would fade in. "I knew it the first time I laid eyes on her. An angel married to a vicious brute."

"He never stopped working," the plummy voice would override. "I heard his typewriter going at all hours. The trouble was she never appreciated what a hard-working man he was."

"There you go, making the same old mistake. There are other worthwhile contributions besides work."

"I should have expected you to hold that opinion."

The agent would let his prospects out of the house, hearing them agree that they would have to be crazy to move in next to a couple who were obviously going to kill each other one day.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Raffles story by

BARRY PEROWNE

A. J. Raffles, the most famous cracksman of his time, in another turn-of-the-century crime story, with some world celebrities as characters and with all the lovely Victorian detail at which Mr. Perowne is so masterly—a tale of revenge and intrigue and derring-do, with the inevitable profit-for-purloining that the inimitable Raffles invariably manages at the end of each adventure . . .

RAFFLES AND THE SWEET TASTE OF REVENGE

by BARRY PEROWNE

"Sundays in London are seldom exhilarating, Bunny," remarked A. J. Raffles, "but at least they offer this parade of the reigning beauties of Society and the Stage."

"A pleasing Sabbath custom, Raffles," I concurred.

Like a good many other citizens, we were sauntering in Hyde Park and admiring the *toilettes* of the reigning beauties as they rode to and fro in open carriages driven by cockaded coachmen.

The jingling of the high-stepping horses mingled harmoniously with the melodies coming from the musicians of the Grenadier Guards in the bandstand, and swans floated on the sunny waters of the nearby Serpentine.

Immaculate in morning dress, his keen face tanned, a pearl in his cravat, Raffles suddenly drew my attention to an approaching carriage.

"Here comes the carriage," he said, "of a lady who once gave me a keepsake."

"How romantic of her!" I said.

"I value it highly," said Raffles, "even though she gave almost

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identical keepsakes to eleven gentlemen from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania."

To the lady in the passing carriage, who had only one gentleman with her, Raffles raised his grey topper courteously, so I likewise raised my own.

The gentleman did not raise his, for he did not see us. But the lady, exquisite in the shade of her parasol, accorded us a graceful inclination, and I seemed to detect in her lovely eyes, as she smiled at Raffles, a glimmer of mischief.

This intrigued me.

"Raffles," I said, as we continued our stroll, "isn't that lady the celebrated Mrs. Langtry—'The Jersey Lily'?"

"Yes, Bunny," he said, "that's Lillie Langtry, *née* Emily Charlotte Le Breton. She's the daughter of an eminent divine—the Dean of Jersey, Channel Islands—and is the first lady of social consequence to have defied convention and, to the horror of Society circles, appeared as a professional actress on the stage of a London theatre."

The music of the Grenadier Guards was fading behind us. A distant shouting grew audible. It came from the far side of the park where a space was reserved for soapbox oratory, and the shouting was that of Sunday agitators preaching the overthrow of the established social order. But we were going the other way, towards the Hyde Park Corner exit.

"I still was in my last year at school," said Raffles, "so I didn't see the theatrical debut of the Dean of Jersey's beautiful, well-bred daughter, but it was at the Haymarket theatre, Bunny. She appeared there in the role of Kate Hardcastle in a revival, by the famous Bancrofts, of Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer.*"

"With her beauty," I said, "she can hardly have failed to conquer!"

"As to that," said Raffles, "she certainly, a few years later, conquered me—and the eleven gentlemen from Philadelphia who were in England to make a debut of their own."

"As actors?" I asked.

"No, Bunny, they were more unusual than that—for Americans. They were cricketers. They were the only American cricket team to have visited this country," said Raffles. "Naturally, their arrival created a good deal of interest, so they were invited to make their first London appearance in a match at Lord's."

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "They actually played at *Lord's*, home

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ground of the Marylebone Cricket Club, the legislative panjandrums of the game?"

Raffles assured me that I should find the match—M.C.C. versus Gentlemen of Philadelphia—fully recorded in *Wisden's Cricket Almanac*.

"As a matter of fact," Raffles said, "it was a damned good match, Bunny. The Philadelphians were as handy performers at cricket as they were at polo, racquets, golf, or any other gentleman's game. I enjoyed playing cricket against them and after the match both teams went to the Haymarket theatre to see Lillie Langtry, appearing there in the role of Rosalind. She was the toast of the town, Bunny—the Jersey Lily! The Philadelphia chaps were captivated by her."

Emerging from the park, we turned to our left. In the noonday heat lower Piccadilly was deserted except for a pedestrian here and there, a hansom or two, and a Piccadilly flower seller mooching along ahead of us up the slope, her button boots down-at-heel under the hems of her skirts and petticoats, a yellowing straw boater on her head, her basket of blossoms on her arm.

"As it happened," said Raffles, "the match against the Philadelphians was an important one for me, as it was the last of the qualifying matches I had to play in to be elected an M.C.C. member. So I felt I should make a gesture for the Philadelphians. I thought it would give them pleasure if I could wangle them a personal meeting with Lillie Langtry."

"An enviable privilege, Raffles!"

"My own view exactly, Bunny. Accordingly, after the matinée next day at the Haymarket, I presented myself at the stage door—first time I'd done such a thing—and handed in a fine bouquet of lilies, along with my visiting-card on which I'd written a message asking if Mrs. Langtry would consent to receive me on a matter of importance to transatlantic good relations."

"Did she receive you, Raffles?" I asked.

Before he could answer, a cry of outrage attracted our attention. It came from the Piccadilly flower seller. Hawking her wares, she had waylaid a couple of men. One of them I knew slightly. Thickset, frockcoated, silk-hatted, he had a handsome black moustache. The other man was taller, slim and erect in a Norfolk knickerbocker cycling suit and a corduroy cap. His hair, beard, and eyebrows were vividly auburn in the sun-glare, and he evidently had said something that incensed the flower seller.

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"*Press*?" she shouted at him. "Wotcher mean, 'Gen'lemen o' the Press pass free'? Not wiv me they don't! Them rosebuds is a tanner apiece an' it don't make no odds to me if you're gen'lemen o' the Press or gen'lemen o' the royal bleedin' bedchamber!"

"Ah-hah!" said the red-bearded man. "A fellow radical, I take it?"

"Don't answer him, love, he's teasing you," said the black-moustached man, and he patted the flower seller's cheek.

"Tyke yer 'ands off me!" she shrilled.

"Powerful words," said red-bearded man, "if a trifle trite. But no matter. Here you are, young woman—here, without prejudice to the right of the Press to pass freely, is half-a-crown for two of your rosebuds."

"Blimey!" exclaimed the flowerseller, appeased. " 'Arf-a-crahn! Thanks, mister—ta muchly!"

Spotting a possible customer on the far side of the street, she hastened across. The two men she had just dealt with came on down the slope.

"Red rosebuds in our buttonholes, Harris," said the man with the auburn beard, "will mark us as sympathizers with the subversive orators we're about to listen to in Hyde Park. They'll be inspired to more fervent perorations. But you heard that flower seller, with her *'Blimey, 'arf-a-crahn!'* It's an instance of what I'm driving at, Harris, when I argue that our free schools should be made to teach a simplified English and a uniform enunciation as a primary step to social reform."

As the two men passed Raffles and myself, the black-moustached man tilted his silk hat to me. I tilted my own topper in response. The red-bearded man, walking with a jaunty step, merely shot us an alert glance, his blue eyes sparkling with a vivacity that bespoke an exceptional intellect. His voice receded as he went on talking to his companion.

"Who's your black-moustached acquaintance, Bunny?" Raffles asked.

"He's a chap I met once or twice when I was dabbling in journalism. He edits a literary review—published every Saturday. I believe the red-bearded chap's one of its staffmen—covers music or drama or something. But you were about to tell me, Raffles—did Mrs. Langtry receive you when you handed in your flowers and message at the Haymarket theatre?"

"She did indeed, Bunny," Raffles said. He took out his gold

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half-hunter for a glance at it. "We're a bit early for lunch at that Jermyn Street restaurant. Let's stroll up Half Moon Street and round through Berkeley Square."

Hardly a person was to be seen in the sweltering streets as he went on to tell me that Mrs. Langtry had received him in her dressing-room.

"She was chaperoned, of course, by her maid," said Raffles. "Bunny, you saw Lillie Langtry this morning in the high summer of her beauty, but you should have seen her, as I did, in her springtime! She was most gracious. She called for a vase and arranged my flowers with her own lovely hands as she listened to what I had to say. I explained that I had just become a member of the M.C.C.—and she said, with sensitive understanding, that no doubt that was advantageous for a young man-about-town. I admitted it. I said that one of the advantages was that I could now use the Members' Restaurant at Lord's.

"By way of celebration, I told her, I was planning a luncheon party there for eleven gentleman cricketers from Philadelphia. I explained how deeply they—and I—had admired her in the role of Rosalind, and what a wonderful surprise it would be for my eleven guests, and what a lift it would give to the cause of cricket in the United States, if she would consent to grace the luncheon with her presence. She hesitated, Bunny."

"And no wonder, Raffles!" I said. "You, a stranger to her, were asking the gently-bred daughter of an eminent divine to lunch with you and eleven other strangers!"

"Ah, but the venue of the luncheon was *Lord's*, Bunny," Raffles said. "That weighed with her. I could see it in her lovely eyes as she stood looking at me thoughtfully. And at last—impulsively, Bunny, as when she defied convention and made her first stage appearance in *She Stoops To Conquer*—she reached a decision. She smiled at me and said she couldn't possibly decline an invitation that would be helpful to the cause of transatlantic cricket."

"Adorable woman!" I exclaimed.

"And never more adorable," said Raffles, "than at my luncheon party. She was irresistible—a Venus at Lord's. I date time from the occasion. My Philadelphian friends—I had a letter from one of them just the other day—never fail to mention it when they write. They voted that luncheon at Lord's a brilliant success."

"You mentioned a keepsake, Raffles," I reminded him.

"Twelve keepsakes, actually," he said. "To mark the occasion,

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Lillie Langtry allowed a special photograph to be taken of her. She gave each of us a copy, inscribed to us individually. It's a unique photograph of her, Bunny. For charm and allure, no other photograph of The Jersey Lily can compare with it. And only the eleven gentlemen of Philadelphia—and myself, of course—have copies."

As I expressed my envy, we reached St. James's Street. Two sentries in scarlet tunics and bearskin busbies guarded the modest palace at the far end, where the heir to the throne had his *pied-à-terre.*

We turned to our left, into Jermyn Street. Only a solitary woman was in sight there. Between the discreetly elegant establishments of hatters, haberdashers, and snuff-blenders whose grandfathers had catered to the refined tastes of Beau Brummell and Beau Nash, the lone female was mooching along, about a hundred yards ahead, her back to us, a basket on her arm, a yellowing straw boater on her head.

"Raffles," I said, "there's that flower seller again."

"Yes, Bunny," he said, "and she seems to have spotted something lying on the pavement. It looks like a wallet—probably dropped by some gentleman."

The wench quickened her pace. She bent down to pick up her find. She seemed to have difficulty in doing so. She scrabbled at it with her fingers, but it resisted her efforts.

"She stoops," Raffles murmured, "but not to conquer!" Suddenly he gripped my arm, jerked me into the shop doorway of a famous breeches-maker. "Bunny, note that open window on the second floor of the house next to the Turkish Baths. A curtain moved at that window. That wallet's been glued to the pavement, and the young woman's being watched!"

The same suspicion seemed to dawn on the flower seller. She straightened up, glancing about her. From the open window above her sounded a laugh, half suppressed. She heard it, looked up quickly. The curtain was swept aside, and three young men of elegant appearance were grinning down at her. They had glasses in their hands.

I saw her flush deeply.

She shouted an obscene word, then, "Garn, get aht of it!"

Her anger delighted them. "Miaouw!" they chorussed. "Miaouw, pussycat, miaouw!"

A youth with classical features and golden hair leaned from the

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window, calling, "Puss, puss—here, puss—*catch*!"

He tossed her a coin. It flashed in the sunshine and tinkled at her feet. It was a sovereign.

"Too late," Raffles muttered, his grip iron-hard on my arm, "too late for alms! They've hurt her pride."

She kicked the coin into the gutter. They roared with laughter.

She shrilled another obscene word. Then her voice broke in a passion of fury and humiliation, and she ran off down the street.

"So!" said Raffles. "West End 'bloods,' Bunny—degenerate heirs of the Wits of yore—with a beaux' strategem to while away the tedium of a sultry Sunday. How many inoffensive people have they humiliated this morning with that crude practical joke? Come on!"

We emerged from the shop doorway. From that open window on the second floor came roars of laughter and the pop of a champagne cork.

"Note the brass plate," Raffles said, "on the street door: *Prince Regent House—Service Chambers for Gentlemen.* H'm, that depends on what you mean by the word 'gentleman.' Mark the house well, Bunny. We'll get Ivor Kern, our invaluable 'fence,' to put one of his snoops on to finding out who occupies the second-floor chambers in that house."

Walking on past the house, we came to the restaurant where we had planned to lunch.

"You go on in, Bunny," Raffles said. "I have other business. If the flower girl had been going to Piccadilly Circus, where her colleagues foregather, she'd have turned left out of Jermyn Street here. She didn't. She turned right. So she may be going to her home. I'm going to follow her and find out where she lives."

"What do you intend?" I asked.

"I intend the revenge of the flower girl," Raffles said, his grey eyes hard, "on the Joker of Jermyn Street."

He walked off and left me.

And he himself, that hot Sunday, lunched on bread-and-cheese at a pub on the corner of a street in Lambeth, south of the river.

"It was the street where the flower girl lives," he told me, three days later, when he routed me out from my flat just as I was sitting down to breakfast, and hustled me into a four-wheeler cab he had waiting. "The landlord of the pub knew all about her. Her name's Elsie Wiggins. She's nineteen and lives with her father, one Bill Wiggins. He's a pugilist—which fits in rather helpfully

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for us because of that letter I told you I had the other day from one of the eleven gentlemen in Philadelphia."

"How does the letter fit in?" I asked, puzzled.

"You'll see presently," said Raffles. "Anyway, Bill Wiggins came into the pub while I was there. The landlord pointed him out to me. I got into conversation with him, bought him a drink. As a pugilist, he's over the hill, I'm afraid. He picks up a quid or two now and then, as a substitute at The Ring, Blackfriars, or Hoxton Baths, and he ekes out by doing casual labour."

Raffles took out his watch and glanced at it.

"I've arranged to pick him up at Hyde Park Corner. We've got to be circumspect, Bunny. Elsie has her pride, and a temper that goes with her hair, which is almost as red as the beard of that drama critic who bought her rosebuds on Sunday. To win her confidence, which is necessary to my plans, I must first get in well with her father."

The cab jingled to a halt alongside the traffic island at Hyde Park Corner. The sun was just beginning to break through the muggy morning mist. Near the equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington a man was standing. Tall, leathery, lantern-jawed, he wore a blue serge suit and a bowler hat. He moved forward as the cab pulled up.

"Ah, there you are, Mr. Wiggins," said Raffles. "Hop in! This is Mr. Manders, a friend of mine." He called to the cabbie, "The Star-and-Garter, Richmond. Go the short way, across Richmond Park." As we bowled off through Knightsbridge, Raffles offered us a Sullivan apiece from his cigarette-case.

"Well now, Mr. Wiggins," he said, "I was just telling Mr. Manders here that, when I had the luck to get acquainted with you on Sunday, I mentioned a letter from an American gentleman. You remember my telling you about him and his ten friends, Bunny—all-round sportsmen, true Corinthians?"

"I recall it distinctly," I said, feeling vaguely uneasy.

"The letter mentioned," said Raffles, "that they're sponsoring a young boxer they've discovered in Philadelphia. They hope to build him up to challenge the great James J. Jeffries. For the time being they're keeping their boy out of American rings. When they spring him over there, they want him to make a sensation. Meantime, to get him experience, they've arranged a few good prelims for him over here. They've asked me to have a look at their boy and give them an opinion."

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Raffles chuckled.

"Cricket's my game, rather than boxing," he admitted, "so it was lucky I met Mr. Wiggins, Bunny. He's kindly consented to give us the benefit of his extensive experience in British rings and have a look at this Philadelphia boy for us. I understand from the letter that the boy and his trainer will have arrived last week and gone to quarters arranged for them alongside the Star-and-Garter at Richmond."

"They couldn't do better, for trainin' quarters," said Mr. Wiggins.

He was not a talkative man, Elsie's father. It was Raffles, glancing now and then at his watch, who bore the brunt of the conversation as we jingled through Hammersmith, rattled across Barnes Common, and clip-clopped up Priory Lane to the great wrought-iron gateway to Richmond Park.

"The Star-and-Garter's about a mile ahead, on the far side of the park," Raffles said. "It's pretty historic, this park. It was once a royal hunting preserve."

The sun, which had dispelled the mist, shone down on the road which meandered, dust-white, over the wide, lonely expanse of rolling grassland dotted with gnarled old oak trees. Deer browsed here and there, circled over by jackdaws sounding their harsh cries.

"The man who founded the city of Richmond, Virginia, came from here," said Raffles. "And Miss Fanny Burney records in her famous *Diary* of high life a disturbing experience she had here. She was taking a walk, all by herself, when suddenly poor old mad King George the Third, making strange grimaces and wild gestures, jumped out at her from behind—" He broke off abruptly, pointing. "Look! Can that be the chap we want to see?"

About a hundred yards distant a chunky fellow in a sweater and cloth cap was jogging up a rough track that skirted a coppice of trees. He was followed by a man in a sweater and a brown bowler hat who was toiling along on a bicycle.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Wiggins, "that'll be the Yank boy an' 'is trainer doin' their road work."

Raffles called to our cabbie to pull up. We sat watching the young pugilist and his trainer recede up the slope. Almost as they reached the brow of it, half-a-dozen men, swinging cudgels, burst out suddenly from the shade of the trees and hurled the trainer from his bike.

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"Nobblers, by God!" Bill Wiggins roared. "Look at 'em—goin' for the pug's kneecaps with them bleedin' cudgels!"

He flung open the cab door, went off at a run up the grassy slope. Raffles and I followed. The trainer, his bicycle, and one of the attackers were locked in a tangle, rolling over and over. The boxer was striking out at the ruffians as they circled him, now darting in to swipe at his kneecaps, now leaping back, agile as wolves.

The slope was steep. I stumbled. Raffles gripped my arm, steadying me, as Bill Wiggins, roaring, "Get aht of it!", joined in the fight, both fists swinging.

The reinforcement was too much for the nobblers. They dived back into the coppice, the last of them scrabbling rapidly on all fours into the undergrowth as Raffles and I reached the scene.

"You okay, Johnnie?" the trainer was asking his fighter.

"Sure," said Johnnie, "thanks to this gent." He shook hands gratefully with Bill Wiggins. "But, damn, what kind of a country *is* this?"

"That's a good question," said Raffles. "It's one of many you're apt to find yourselves asking, concerning the ins and outs of English prizefighting; and by Jove nobody's better equipped to answer them for you than Mr. Wiggins here. He knows the boxing game inside out. As a matter of fact, we were on our way to visit you. I know your sponsors, and they wouldn't like this thing that's just happened."

"You're telling us!" said the trainer, licking his bruised knuckles.

"Frankly, gentlemen," Raffles said, "I think you need, as newcomers over here, the help of someone who has long experience of British boxing and its parasites. Otherwise you could run into worse trouble. Look here, I suggest that we repair to the Star-and-Garter and generally review the situation. Our cab's waiting down there, and we can put this bicycle, which seems to have been severely bent in the fray, on the cab roof."

"The gent makes sense, Vinnie," the young Philadelphian pugilist said to his trainer. "Come on, let's go talk it over with him."

The outcome of the subsequent conference was pleasing to Raffles.

"The point is, Bunny," he explained to me later, in private, "Bill Wiggins now has a job—earned by his own vigorous inter-

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vention. He's on the Philadelphia payroll. He'll be a useful sparring-partner for Johnnie in his training and a good second for the boy to have in his corner. And now, with the excuse of inquiring about Johnnie's progress, I can drop in occasionally on Bill Wiggins at his home. That way I can get to know Elsie and win her confidence."

"What a bit of luck," I said, "that ambush!"

"Well, actually," said Raffles, "I arranged it myself—with the help of Ivor Kern. I had him set one of his men to study the curriculum of Johnnie and his trainer. They take that run in Richmond Park twice a day—you can set your watch by them—and they invariably follow the same route. So I fixed it with Kern to hire those ruffians to stage their harmless ballet with cudgels.

"Meanwhile, another of Kern's hirelings has been investigating the Joker of Jermyn Street. His name's Lord Anthony Dauntsey. He inherited the title, a fortune—and a valuable collection of signet rings. They're of the Regency period, Bunny. They're rings that once belonged to famous dandies, Beau Brummell and the like. Those bygone 'bucks' are Dauntsey's heroes. He apes what he imagines was their way of life, their mannerisms and conceits. Ivor Kern's snoop reports that Dauntsey invariably wears one or the other of those rings when he dines out. So the chances are that he keeps the collection handy—at his Jermyn Street chambers. You follow me?"

I nodded, swallowing with a parched throat, and he gave me a wicked look.

"You'll hear from me anon," he said.

Anon turned out to be a week later, when a note from him arrived at my Mount Street flat. The note asked me to drop round to The Albany, where he had his chambers, at eight o'clock that evening.

When I knocked on his door, it opened immediately. I stepped in—and my heart gave a great lurch as a gag was whipped over my mouth from behind.

"Don't struggle," said Raffles. "This is just an experiment, Bunny!"

Tying the gag tightly, he took me by the arm, thrust me down into a saddlebag chair in his comfortable, gaslit living-room.

If I had been able to, I would have protested vehemently. This being impossible, I could only stare at him with unconcealed but muted reproach.

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"You must excuse my taking this liberty with you, Bunny," he said. "There's a purpose behind it." He glanced at the clock on his mantelpiece. "It's a few seconds to eight. When the clock goes *ping,* start trying to loosen that gag by jaw movements alone. Remember, jaw only!"

As he spoke, the clock went *ping*—and at once, mollified by his apology for his behaviour, I started to manipulate my lower jaw to try to rid myself of my oral impediment. The clock uttered seven more musical *pings,* then resumed its quiet ticking, scarcely audible to me as my breath began to whistle in my distended nostrils.

"Jaw only," Raffles warned me. "No hands!" He was watching my exertions with clinical interest. "Beads are beginning to appear on your brow, Bunny. That's good. Keep trying!"

My jaw-twitchings communicated themselves to the remainder of my body, causing it to heave and writhe in sympathetic response. Raffles lighted a cigarette.

"On the pretext," he said, "of getting Bill Wiggins' opinion of the Philadelphia boxer, I called at the Wiggins home in Lambeth last night. Elsie was there. I was pressed to stay for supper. Elsie whipped up a rather good dish, quite new to me. It's called toad-in-the-hole. One drinks stout with it. We had a pleasant evening, and now I'm pretty well in with the Wigginses, so we can proceed, Bunny, to the next step in arranging Elsie's revenge on the Joker of Jermyn Street. Meantime, how are you getting along?"

I mewed through my gag.

"That's right," Raffles said. "Keep at it. Don't relax. I'll get a drink ready for you."

Taking a decanter from the tantalus on his table, he mixed a couple of whisky-and-sodas. Sipping his own appreciatively, he placed the other within my reach. At this I redoubled my efforts to ungag myself.

"So far," Raffles said, "you've been at it for twenty minutes. I see that your pores are now well open. You're perspiring freely. The perspiration is trickling down and beginning to saturate the gag. Are you becoming aware of a kind of sweet flavour?"

I nodded affirmatively.

"Good," said Raffles. "That flavour, Bunny, is the sweet taste of revenge. I've prepared that gag on the poultice principle. It's a lady's silk stocking partially filled with powdered sugar. As your rising temperature and copious perspiration melts the sugar, it trickles down your chin, causing the poultice-gag to become pro-

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gressively thinner, and therefore, if my theory proves correct in practice, looser."

His theory was indeed correct—for, just as three mellow *pings* from the clock announced a quarter-to-nine, the gag, wasted by deliquescence, slid down my chin. I drew in deep, gasping breaths and took a gulp of my waiting whisky-and-soda.

"Forty-five minutes exactly," Raffles said. "Splendid, Bunny! I have an identical poultice-gag, ready prepared in my pocket, and we now know the time it should give us to do the job I have in mind. Now, you'd better have a wash. Your evening-dress collar is a bit sticky and wilted, so I'll lend you one of mine, and a fresh white tie. Then I'll stand you dinner at Frascati's in Oxford Street, which is handy for Russell Square, where we have a business appointment to keep."

I had thought that our business appointment would be in Jermyn Street, so I was at a loss to divine Raffles' intentions when, at about eleven o'clock, we strolled past the British Museum and turned into Russell Square.

The night was warm and muggy. In the extensive garden which, enclosed by tall iron railings, occupied the centre of the square, trees loomed up darkly against the background of lighted windows here and there in the surrounding residences.

"This central garden," Raffles said, "is reserved for the use of householders in the square. They each have a key to its gates, of which there's one on each side. That hotel on the north side also has a key, which people who stay there can borrow if they wish to sit in the garden. I had one of Kern's men spend a night at the hotel and borrow the key. He took an impression of it and had a couple of duplicates made. This is one of them."

Taking a key from his pocket, he glanced round, then unlocked the gate in the tall iron railings. We entered the garden, its lawns, flowerbeds, shrubberies, and paved paths dimly discernible in the starlight.

"Ivor Kern's snoop reported," Raffles said, "that there's a social function going on at that hotel tonight—which fits in very well for us, Bunny. It's a gathering of school principals and their wives up from the country. Now, our appointment is at the sixth seat on the path from the gate that faces the hotel. Yes, I see the seat. Nobody there—as yet. Come on!"

We walked along to the seat in question. A heavy, park-type seat, it was overhung by the branches of a tree that grew behind

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it. We took up a position in the black shadow of the tree. Raffles told me to tie my handkerchief triangularly over my face. Similarly masking himself, he took something from the pocket of his evening-cape.

"Here, Bunny," he said, "is a coil of window-sash cord—of a length suitable for tying people firmly to seats. When you see me apply the sugar-poultice gag, you yourself make prompt use of the coil of cord. Is that quite clear?"

"Absolutely, Raffles," I said.

Now and then footsteps and voices sounded as pedestrians passed by outside the railings. An occasional cab rumbled by, its nag clip-clopping. Suddenly Raffles gripped my arm.

"At last, Bunny," he said. "I hear a cab pulling up outside the north gate. The cab's dropping a fare and jingling off again. Listen!"

My breath held, I heard a metallic clang.

"This'll be our man," Raffles murmured. "He has the other key I had made for this garden. He's come in, clanged the gate shut behind him. Be ready with the cord!"

Footsteps sounded, approaching. Shadowy in the star-glimmer, a tall figure, top-hatted, was coming along the path—audibly counting.

"Fifth seat," I heard the newcomer say, and then, as he drew closer to us, "Here we are—the sixth seat from the north gate."

He stopped in front of the seat. He was scarcely a couple of strides from us. His starched shirtfront gleamed faintly as he stood there, and I dimly discerned his profile—the classical profile of Lord Anthony Dauntsey. He took a cigarette-case from his pocket. Tapping a cigarette fastidiously on the case, he sat down on the seat, his back to us.

Raffles, the deceptive silk stocking held dacoit-wise in his two hands, moved a pace forward. Light as his step was, a twig cracked under his foot, and Dauntsey half-turned his head, saying sharply, "Who's there?"

"Beau Brummell," said Raffles, as he looped the stocking swiftly over Dauntsey's head, knocking his hat off, and secured the gag over the fellow's mouth, then grabbed his hands and pulled them behind him for me to secure his wrists with the cord.

This I instantly did, giving the cord a couple of turns over the back-rail of the seat, then dropping on my knees so that I could reach under the seat, seize Dauntsey's ankles, pull them back,

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loop the cord firmly around them, then tie the end of the cord to his bound wrists, thus effectively trussing him.

Raffles tested my cord work, found it good, gave me a nod of approval. We walked away and, removing our handkerchief-masks, left Russell Square garden.

"So far, so good, Bunny," said Raffles. "Dauntsey is now immobilized. We know from our experiment that it will be approximately forty-five minutes before the perspiration resulting from his struggles to free himself melts the powdered sugar in his gag and enables him to shout for help."

A hansom was passing and Raffles hailed it.

"Forty-five minutes will be ample for our purpose," Raffles went on. "While you were securing Dauntsey to the seat, I relieved him of his key-ring. Among the keys on it will be, undoubtedly, his key to the street door of Prince Regent House, Jermyn Street, together with the key to his chambers on the second floor, and the key to whatever drawer, bureau, jewel-case, or strongbox he keeps his collection of Regency signet rings in. So what remains to be done is so simple, Bunny, that we'll part at Piccadilly Circus and you can leave the rest to me."

The next day I had a note from him telling me that the Regency-ring collection was now safely in the hands of our fence, Ivor Kern, and that he, Raffles, would be in touch with me again when Kern had negotiated the disposal of the collection.

To obtain top price on the clandestine market naturally took time, and autumn was drawing nigh before I received another note from Raffles. It was to inform me that he was giving a small party that evening—just a theatre-and-supper affair—and I was invited to join him at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket.

The social season was now in full swing and when I reached the famous Haymarket theatre, the gaslights of its pillared portico were shining out into the autumnal mist and many cabs and carriages were discharging a brilliant audience. For it was a first night. And I could not help smiling to myself as I saw from the theatre bills that the play at which Raffles had chosen to entertain his party was a revival, by the celebrated Bancrofts, of that classic comedy, *The Beaux' Stratagem.*

In the foyer, thronged with arriving parties, I deposited my outdoor things with the *vestiaire* and looked around for Raffles. Seeing no sign of him, I consulted a white-gloved, liveried usher.

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"Are you Mr. Manders?" he asked. "Very good, sir. Follow me, please."

He led me, by way of carpeted staircase and corridors, to a box, and as he opened the door for me, music swelled louder from the lighted auditorium.

"Ah, there you are, Bunny!" said Raffles.

In the box with him were another man in evening-dress—Johnnie Jessop, the young Philadelphian boxer, with a strip of sticking-plaster over his right eyebrow—and two ladies, who were toying with their programmes and opera-glasses. One of the ladies, white-haired, was of tall and majestic bearing; the other was young, of radiant beauty, gowned with exquisite taste. Raffles introduced me, first, to the elderly lady.

"Mrs. Constance Benstead, Bunny," he said. "Mrs. Benstead has long been a friend of mine."

"I've known Mr. Raffles," Mrs. Benstead told me, "ever since I was touring—some years ago now—with Mr. Henry Irving in his production of *The Lyons Mail*. We played the Prince's Theatre, Portsmouth, and dear Mr. Irving took some of us in the cast to a cricket match in which Mr. Raffles was batting against the Royal Navy."

"How many valued friends," Raffles said, "I owe to cricket! These days, Bunny, Mrs. Benstead is London's most distinguished coach in matters of elocution, etiquette, and comportment. And now, my dear chap, let me introduce you to—Miss Elsie Wiggins."

"How do you do, Mr. Manders?" said Elsie graciously. "Mr. Raffles tells me that you know my father."

"Yes, indeed," I managed to mumble as, stunned by the transformation in her, I bowed over her hand, white-gloved to the elbow.

"And of course, Bunny," Raffles said, "Mr. Johnnie Jessop of Philadelphia—you met in Richmond Park. Johnnie, if I may call him so, knocked out Alf Burkitt of Shadwell in the eighth round at The Ring, Blackfriars, last night—so this little party is by way of celebration."

"It was a lovely fight," said Elsie. "Mind you, Mr. Jessop, when Alf Burkitt opened up that cut over your eye, you'd have been a goner if you hadn't had my dad in your corner."

"I know it, Miss Wiggins," said the young Philadelphian pugilist. "Your dad's a wonder with the styptic. He patched me up just great."

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"I wish I'd seen the fight." I looked reproachfully at Raffles.

"Damnation," he said, "I clean forgot to tell you about it! I'm sorry, Bunny."

"Dad's gone off somewhere with Mr. Hoyt, Mr. Jessop's trainer," Elsie told me. "They don't go much for theatre plays, them two."

I saw Mrs. Benstead wince, murmuring, "*Those* two, Elsie"—a correction which Elsie took in good part. In fact, she gave the old actress a grateful look. I sensed a rapport between them, and it seemed to me almost incredible that this poised young woman with the beautiful auburn hair was the flower girl who had stooped to scrabble vainly at a wallet glued to the pavement by the Joker of Jermyn Street.

"A Bancrofts first night," remarked Mrs. Benstead, scrutinizing the auditorium through her ivory-handled opera-glasses, "is always a great theatrical occasion, Elsie. I see many persons of consequence taking their seats down there. The gentleman with the very bald head in the fourth row is Mr. Arthur Wing Pinero, the famous playwright. The gentleman scribbling a note on his shirt-cuff is the *doyen* of London critics, Mr. William Archer. Darling man, he once wrote most perceptively about me."

"He's a kind man," Elsie agreed. "I didn't know who he was, but he always had a smile for me when I was standing outside theatres with my basket."

"Well, that won't happen again, Elsie dear," said Mrs. Benstead, "now that Mr. Raffles is making other arrangements for you. Ah, I see that Mr. Bram Stoker, the vampire man, is here—I knew him well when I was in dear Mr. Irving's number-one touring company. Mr. Stoker's Irish, you know, and the red-bearded gentleman he's talking to is another Irishman—the rather radical dramatic critic of *The Saturday Review*."

"I've seen *him* before, too," said Elsie.

The lights began to dim. The music from the orchestra pit, and the hum of cultured conversation in the auditorium, died away. Smoothly, the curtain swept up to reveal the elegant stage set of *The Beaux' Stratagem*.

Raffles had insisted that Johnnie Jessop sit between the two ladies, at the front of the box. Raffles and I sat behind them, on gilt-backed, plush-seated chairs; and now, in the darkness, Raffles asked me in a whisper if I had been pleasantly surprised by the transformation of Elsie since he had persuaded her to accept tutelage from Mrs. Benstead.

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"I was dumfounded," I whispered back. "But what are these 'other arrangements' you've made for Elsie?"

He explained, in a whisper, that Lord Anthony Dauntsey's collection of Regency signet rings had fetched a good price.

"I've invested half of it," Raffles whispered. "I've acquired the lease on a small shop in Knightsbridge. Shh, now, pay attention to the play."

My mind seethed with questions. I could not keep it on the play, but Elsie enjoyed it. Her brown eyes were bright with excitement as we collected our outdoor things from the *vestiaire* in the thronged foyer. Jewelled bosoms and starched shirtfronts jostled around us, and Elsie could not stop chattering as Raffles helped her on with her cloak, while Johnnie attended to Mrs. Benstead's evening mantle.

"Are we going somewhere else now, Mr. Raffles?" asked Elsie, all keyed up.

"We're going to Willis' Supper Rooms," Raffles said, "when we can get through this crush and find a cab."

"In the meantime, sir," said a man who seemed to be making impatient efforts to reach the *vestiaire* counter, "would you have a goodness to let me pass?"

"Oh, oh!" said Elsie. "It's the gentleman with the red beard who told me gentlemen of the Press pass free!"

"*I* told you that?" said the red-bearded man, a striking figure in evening-dress, his hair brushed up in two small horns from his lofty temples. "You must be mistaken, madam."

"You don't know me, do you?" said Elsie. Her smile was mischievous. She was enjoying herself. Abandoning her new-found refinement, she suddenly demanded, "Wotcher mean, 'Gen'lemen o' the Press pass free'? Not wiv me they don't! Them rosebuds is a tanner apiece an' it don't make no odds to me if you're gen'lemen o' the Press or—"

" 'Gen'lemen o' the royal bleedin' bedchamber,' " said the critic of *The Saturday Review*. "A hot Sunday in lower Piccadilly! I remember the incident perfectly. But—there's some mystery here—something seems to have happened to you—"

"This gentleman happened to me," said Elsie, delighted, indicating Raffles. "No more mooching around with a basket! I'm going to have a shop to run—a florist shop, high-class—for the carriage tryde—trade. 'Elsie of Knightsbridge,' the shop'll be called—if you should be needing rosebuds sometime."

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"'Elsie of Knightsbridge,'" the dramatic critic said slowly. "I shall remember that." He looked searchingly, with blue, vivacious eyes, at Elsie, then at Raffles, then back again at Elsie. They seemed to have made a marked impression on him. "Rest assured," he said, "I shall indeed remember this happy meeting."

Excusing himself on the grounds that he had to write a review of *The Beaux' Stratagem*, the red-bearded critic bowed and, looking thoughtful, left us, and we made our way out to where the lamps of competing cabs glimmered in the mist.

It was very late when we left Willis' Supper Rooms. I gathered that Johnnie Jessop and his trainer were putting up for the night at Bill Wiggins' home in Lambeth, so Elsie and Johnnie went off there in a hansom, while Raffles and I, in a four-wheeler, took Mrs. Benstead to her flat in Earl's Court. She had taken a good deal of champagne and, as we took leave of her on her doorstep and got back into the cab, her rich voice rose in benevolent valediction.

"'Night's candles,'" she proclaimed, "'are burned out, and jocund day stands tiptoe—*hic*—on the rosy mountaintops—'"

Her voice died away in the dense mist as our cab jingled off.

"Well, Bunny," Raffles said, offering me a Sullivan from his cigarette-case, "that's that. When we make over the shop to Elsie's ownership, her revenge on Beau Dauntsey of Jermyn Street will be fully achieved—though, of course, she'll never realise it."

"A sweet revenge, nevertheless," I concurred. "But, Raffles, I haven't had an opportunity to ask you before, but how did you know that Dauntsey had an appointment in Russell Square garden that night?"

"Come into The Albany for a nightcap," said Raffles, "and I'll show you."

When we reached his chambers, he poured a couple of whisky-and-sodas, opened a drawer in his writing-table, and handed me a small square of stiff, smooth paper.

"I retrieved this from Dauntsey's pocket," Raffles said, "at the same time as I relieved him of his key-ring. Read that message."

He went into his other room, leaving me to read the words that were pencilled, in a large, naive handwriting, on the paper:

"Sir,

Once, when my parents brought me to London, I saw you riding your horse in Hyde Park. How wonderful you looked! I have dreamed of you ever since!! I am in London again with

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my parents and have found out where you *live*!!! We are staying at the hotel in Russell Square. My father is a schoolmaster and very strict. I cannot bear to go back to the country without seeing you. To-night at midnight I shall slip out and wait by the sixth seat from the north gate of Russell Square garden. I enclose a key to the garden!!!!????

Your Unknown Admirer"

Astounded, I turned the square of paper over. It was a photograph of a young woman of extraordinary beauty, her eyes wide, candid, a lily held to her sweetly smiling lips.

"Well, Bunny," said Raffles, returning, "could any gilded youth who fancies himself the heavensent heir of such Regency 'bucks' as Beau Brummell and Beau Nash resist that invitation?"

"Impossible!" I exclaimed.

"Exactly," said Raffles. "Actually, of course, that's a photograph I had made from one—a valued keepsake, Bunny—of which only eleven gentlemen from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and myself have copies. The copies are inscribed to us individually. But, naturally, neither the gentlemen of Philadelphia nor myself would dream of compromising a lady's *name*. That's not a thing one does, on either side of the Atlantic. So I explained to the photographer who re-photographed my keepsake that he must do so in such a way as to omit the personal inscription."

He handed me a much larger photograph in a silver frame. It was the same photograph, irresistible in its well-bred allure, and the inscription was written obliquely, in a sensitive feminine hand, across the lower right-hand corner of the photographic mount:

"To my gallant host at Lord's Cricket Ground,
A. J. Raffles of the M.C.C.
Most sincerely,
Lillie Langtry."

AUTHOR'S NOTE: It may possibly be of interest to remark that research into Mr. Manders' narrative, with a view to establishing its veracity, reveals that, at the time of which Mr. Manders writes, the editor of the London literary weekly, *The Saturday Review*, was indeed black-moustached, virile Mr. Frank Harris, whose

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autobiography, *My Life And Loves,* later created excitement in erotic circles.

The music and drama critic of *The Saturday Review,* during much of Mr. Harris's editorial regime, proves—from research—to have been Mr. George Bernard Shaw, whose auburn beard was then just becoming a familiar and respected feature of London theatrical life.

Owing, however, to the belated discovery of Mr. Manders' narrative among his clandestine records of criminal experience, no sure inference can be drawn from his description of the conversation with Mr. Shaw in the foyer of the Haymarket theatre.

There would appear to be a reasonable possibility, of speculative interest to students of world drama, that the encounter described by Mr. Manders may have started a train of thought in Mr. Shaw's creative mind.

But the question, regrettably enough, remains purely speculative, since it cannot be authoritatively confirmed, at this late date, that it was indeed upon A. J. Raffles and Elsie, the transformed flower seller, that red-bearded Mr. Shaw subsequently based the characters of Professor Higgins and Eliza Doolittle in his famous play, *Pygmalion*, on which was founded the scintillating musical success of more recent times, *My Fair Lady.*

"Q"

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Byfield, Barbara Ninde	A HARDER THING THAN TRIUMPH	Doubleday & Co., Inc.	$6.95	8/5
Fraser, James	HEART'S EASE IN DEATH	Doubleday & Co., Inc.	6.95	8/12
Hill, Reginald	RULING PASSION	Harper & Row	8.95	8/31
Wells, Tobias	A CREATURE WAS STIRRING	Doubleday & Co., Inc.	6.95	8/12
Wolfe, Michael	THE PANAMA PARADOX	Harper & Row	8.95	8/24

Titles and Data Supplied by the Publishers

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

MURDER AT THE WALDORF: One of the outstanding events of every year for all who love the many forms of the mystery is the annual tribute to the memory of Anthony Boucher, the dean of the genre's critics. BOUCHERCON VIII NEW YORK will be held at the celebrated Empire Room of New York's Waldorf-Astoria, and the public is invited to revel in a carnival of crime, a festival of fear, a melange of mystery.

The program begins Friday, October 7, at 6 P.M. and will continue well into the night; goes on Saturday all day and most of the night; and culminates on Sunday afternoon with the special luncheon and award ceremony.

The guest of honor for BOUCHERCON VIII is Stanley Ellin, who will address the banquet attendees. For those who remember his story, "The Specialty of the House," be assured that a sharp eye will be kept on the chefs at the Waldorf. Past guests of honor have included John Ball, Bill S. Ballinger, Robert Block, Robert Fish, and Ellery Queen.

The program is so massive that it is impossible to list everything, and some of the features are still tentative, but the planned speakers include Brian Garfield (author of *Death Wish* and *Hopscotch*), Robert L. Fish (creator of Schlock Homes, José Da Silva, and Kek Huuygens), Walter B. Gibson (creator of The Shadow under the Maxwell Grant pseudonym), Gahan Wilson (*Playboy* cartoonist of the macabre), Phyllis A. Whitney (author of *The Stone Bull* and other gothic novels), Edward D. Hoch (creator of Nick Velvet and Jeffery Rand), Isaac Asimov (author of nearly 50 percent of all books published in the past quarter century), Joan Kahn (editor at Harper & Row), Eleanor Sullivan (managing editor of *EQMM),* and Michele B. Slung (editor of *Crime on Her Mind).*

Scheduled events also include classic mystery films, radio and television programs, an art exhibit, a live dramatic presentation of Sax Rohmer's *The Eye of Siva,* display booths with new, used, and rare mystery books, and au-

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tograph sessions with all speakers.

Membership will be strictly limited to a number that can be comfortably accommodated (there will be no mob scenes reminiscent of some conventions) so it is recommended that you reserve early. The membership fee is $15 for all three days until Oct. 1; after that date, if space is available, the fee is $20. The luncheon at the Hilton Room of the Waldorf is $14.50.

For reservations and further information, write BOUCHERCON VIII, P.O. Box 334, East Station, Yonkers, N.Y. 10704. Make checks payable to BOUCHERCON VIII.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Confessions of a comedy writer. The prolific Neil Simon's regard for the mystery genre extends beyond last year's *Murder by Death*. In the upcoming *The Cheap Detective,* an affectionate parody of all the legendary private-eye movies of the thirties and forties, Peter Falk plays Lou Peckinpaugh, a gumshoe moving through the seamy streets of the 1940s San Francisco waterfront, trying to find his partner's murderer, tangling with unfaithful wives, lost loves, suspicious cops, the German Gestapo, the French Underground, a sought-after *objet d'art,* fat smugglers and billionaire art collectors, a quagmire of multiple identities and double-crosses —in short, a convoluted send-up of all of the traditional detective themes, but this time not quite finishing out the standard way.

"Perhaps this time our incorruptible private eye will not insist the beautiful lady con-artist take the fall for her misadventures," says Simon impishly. Or, perhaps he will. A wickedly funny *film noir, The Cheap Detective* is an expert spoof of vintage whodunits and Neil Simon's warm tribute to the mystery form. (Having finished his role in the film, Falk has on a more serious note started shooting *The Big Stick-Up at Brinks,* drawn from the best-seller about the big robbery.)

High suspense. A gritty realism, a minute concern for a policeman's investigative steps, an absorbing pursuit, and a literally explosive climax mark the superb Swedish *Man on the Roof,* Bo Wilderberg's film of a Martin Beck thriller *(The Abominable Man)* by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö. A bad cop is butchered at the film's beginning; by the finale the assassin—armed atop a downtown roof —practically has the city at bay.

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But no mere policier shootout, this is a finely crafted study of character, and the best crime film so far this year. A dubbed version is being prepared for national release.

No one has been definitely cast as the lead in the screen version of *Hammett,* even though Joe Gores has finished the screenplay from his novel (and Bruce Dern has been considered). Meantime, Jason Robards will portray Dashiell Hammett in *Julia,* a film based on an autobiographical account by Lillian Hellman set in Europe during the uncertain days just before World War II—labelled "a tale of mystery and intrigue." And *The Dain Curse,* which Hammett himself dismissed as "a silly story" but certainly with all its murders is an exciting one, will become a CBS-TV miniseries—the Continental Op yet to be cast, although William Conrad has been mentioned.

The hopelessly addicted mystery lover should not neglect Saturday morning television, where *The Clue Club*—seven lively teenagers in an animated cartoon series—tackles actual whodunits and even "locked room" puzzles. Because of ever-vigilant parents' groups, murder of course is out, but the crimes are often up-to-the-minute—for instance, a vanished solar energy component—the detection classical, and fun.

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INTERVIEW: BRIAN GARFIELD

Primarily a writer of westerns for most of his career, Brian Garfield has enjoyed more success in the mystery field in the past few years than most authors who devote their lives to it. The enormous success of the film *Death Wish,* based on his book, was followed by an Edgar in 1975 for *Hopscotch;* his most recent novel, *Recoil,* has enjoyed rave reviews from some of the publishing world's leading critics.

EQMM: Did *Death Wish* change your life?

GARFIELD: Yes, but not in the obvious ways. Oddly enough, I was already making a good living from my books. *Death Wish,* in fact, didn't sell as well as a lot of my other books had sold previously. It wasn't a good seller in hardcover at all. So, while it wasn't a question of changing my lifestyle, it changed a lot of professional directions for me. For instance, it made it possible for me to start producing films, which I couldn't have done before because I had no track record. Also it changed the content of what I was writing. Not because of the book, but because of the film, and my reaction to it. It suddenly occurred to me that there must be some alternative to the endless

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clichés of violence that we all deal with when we write crime fiction. I have deliberately written books like *Hopscotch,* and the new one, *Recoil,* in which nobody gets hurt—there is no blood shed in those books.

EQMM: Will you continue to write books of that type?

GARFIELD: No, not forever. I'm not a censor, either of myself or anybody else, but it's a fascinating challenge to the ingenuity to be able to come up with a gripping plot that may involve lots of threats to life but doesn't actually involve people getting killed.

EQMM: That is certainly different from *Death Wish.*

GARFIELD: Sure it is. The impetus for *Death Wish,* by the way, was a very minor crime of which I was the victim. I just let my fantasies have free rein.

EQMM: You identified with that character, but carried it to an extreme.

GARFIELD: Of course. He went way off the deep end. But everybody has had that fantasy. That merely served as the impetus for the story.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

In Victor Canning's latest novel, *The Doomsday Carrier* (Morrow, $7.95), a chimpanzee named Charlie escapes from a British germ warfare research station—and if he isn't caught within twenty-one days, he will cause a plague epidemic. Because public officials are reluctant to reveal the real reason the missing chimp must be found, the underdog-loving British public is not too cooperative.

One of the finest writers in the crime-suspense field, Canning exploits the situation for suspense, humor, irony, and moral pondering. Though the human characters are well drawn, Charlie is the book's most sympathetic and memorable figure. (****)

**** William Kotzwinkle: *Fata Morgana,* Knopf, $7.95. In the Paris of 1861, Police Inspector Paul Picard investigates the mysterious Ric Lazare, magician or mountebank or both. A one-of-a-kind historical mystery—haunting, dreamlike, decadent, insistently unconventional.

**** Ed McBain: *Long Time No See,* Random House, $7.95. In the longest 87th Precinct novel and the best in several years, Steve Carella seeks the killer of three apparently inoffensive blind people. As usual, among the strengths are McBain's infallible ear for American speech and those gloriously irrelevant philosophical sidebars, as welcome here as in John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee books.

*** Brian Coffey: *The Face of*

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Fear, Bobbs Merrill, $8.95. A Ripper-style killer, a clairvoyant crime consultant, a predatory talk-show host, and an apologetic cop are some of the elements of this well-crafted thriller, almost literally a cliff-hanger! Coffey is also known as Dean A. Koontz and K. R. Dwyer.

*** Bari Wood and Jack Geasland: *Twins,* Putnam, $8.95. The lives and deaths of Michael and David Ross, identical twin gynecologists, make for an unpleasant but fascinating novel, based (incredibly) on an actual case. For those not overwhelmed by explicit medical detail and sexual kinkiness, it is absorbing reading and not the exploitative schlock some reviews have implied.

*** Lucinda Baker: *Walk the Night Unseen,* Putnam, $8.95. Maggie MacLaren, a naive but resourceful heroine, is presented with a beauty of a problem: how does she reclaim her body, stolen from her by the ghost of a murdered madame? A suspenseful gothic, set in the sure-fire background of turn-of-the-century San Francisco.

*** Ragan Butler: *Captain Nash and the Wroth Inheritance,* St. Martin's, $7.95. Billed as the world's first private detective, Nash operates in England of the 1770s. In his first case, he enters the world of medical quackery and upper-class intrigue. Brief, neat, and colorful.

*** Michael Underwood: *Murder with Malice,* St.Martin's, $7.95. A feminist's delight! While suspended London cop Nick Atwell tiresomely nurses his self-pity, his plucky wife Clare goes to work to clear him of soliciting a bribe from a youthful murder suspect, the son of a powerful TV personality. A soundly plotted job with the dramatic courtroom scenes that are an Underwood specialty.

** R. R. Irvine: *The Face Out Front,* Popular Library, $1.25. An ex-anchorman is terrorized by the homicidal maniac who killed his first wife. Irvine, twice an Edgar nominee for best paperback original, continues to use his TV news background to good effect, but this novel is generally less effective than his first, *Jump Cut,* or his EQMM stories.

** George C. Chesbro: *Shadow of a Broken Man,* Simon and Schuster, $7.95. Dwarf-detective Mongo Frederickson is a great character, but the science-fictional plot of his first book-length case strains credibility to the breaking point. Chesbro's smooth style suggests better things to come.

** Charlie Haas and Tim Hunter: *The Soul Hit,* Harper and Row, $7.95. The world of disc jockeys and record promoters is expertly depicted in this well-written first novel, which introduces a promising new sleuth in ex-FBI man, now peach farmer Ben Marsh, looking into the death of his DJ nephew. Alas, only the plot is routine.

** Wyc Toole: *Death in Deep Shadows,* George F. Stickley Co., 210 West Washington Square,

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Philadelphia, Pa. 19106, $7.95. Toole, a Navy admiral known for his short stories, tells a dramatic and suspenseful story of a Florida murder case, but his editors have let him down. The book badly needs pruning, and a phrase like "deaf and dumb mute" should never have seen print.

Among the recent reprints, Freeman Wills Crofts' *The Cask* (Dover, $3.50), an often cited but difficult to find cornerstone, lives up to its reputation as a classic pure puzzle, though I would still vote for Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* as best first mystery of 1920. And Hillary Waugh's enthralling legal melodrama *Parrish for the Defense* (1974) has been reissued under the best "selling" title since *Golfing for Cats: Doctor on Trial* (Dell, $1.95).

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AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNTED PRICE
Baker, Lucinda	WALK THE NIGHT UNSEEN	Putnam	$8.95	$6.95
Branston, Frank	AN UP AND COMING MAN	St. Martin's Press	7.95	6.35
Butler, Ragan	CAPTAIN NASH AND THE WROTH INHERITANCE	St. Martin's Press	7.95	6.35
Canning, Victor	THE DOOMSDAY CARRIER	Morrow	7.95	6.35
Chesbro, George C.	SHADOW OF A BROKEN MAN	Simon & Schuster	7.95	6.35
Coffey, Brian	THE FACE OF FEAR	Bobbs-Merrill	8.95	6.95
Drummond, Ivor	THE NECKLACE OF SKULLS	St. Martin's Press	7.95	6.35
Duncan, Robert L.	TEMPLE DOGS	Morrow	8.95	6.95
ed. by Ellery Queen	ELLERY QUEEN'S SEARCHES AND SEIZURES	Dial Press	8.95	6.95
Haas, Charlie & Hunter, Tim	THE SOUL HIT	Harper & Row	7.95	6.35
Hardin, Robert	AMATEUR HOUR	Bobbs-Merrill	8.95	6.95
Harrington, R. E.	QUINTAIN	Putnam	7.95	6.35
Kotzwinkle, William	FATA MORGANA	Knopf	7.95	6.35
Kwitny, Jonathan	SHAKEDOWN	Putnam	7.95	6.35
Marlowe, Ann	THE WINNOWING WINDS	Dodd, Mead	7.95	6.35
Martin, Ian Kennedy	THE DEAL OF THE CENTURY	Holt, Rinehart & Winston	6.95	5.50
McBain, Ed	LONG TIME NO SEE	Random House	7.95	6.35
McCloy, Helen	THE IMPOSTOR	Dodd, Mead	6.95	5.50
Mc Ilvanney, William	LAIDLAW	Pantheon Books	7.95	6.35
Price, Anthony	WAR GAME	Doubleday (Crime Club)	7.95	6.35
Scott, Jack S.	THE BASTARD'S NAME WAS BRISTOW	Harper & Row	7.95	6.35
van de Wetering, Janwillem	THE JAPANESE CORPSE	Houghton Mifflin	7.95	6.35
Wood, Bari & Geasland, Jack	TWINS	Putnam	8.95	6.95
Wyllie, John	DEATH IS A DRUM . . . Beating Forever	Doubleday (Crime Club)	6.95	5.50

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

ELLERY QUEEN'S SEARCHES AND SEIZURES, ed. Ellery Queen. Dial Press, $8.95.

This is the 31st annual collection of stories, selected by Ellery Queen as the best stories published in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* in 1975.

The 27 stories deal with detection of all types—deductive, intuitive, and procedural. The detectives' investigations are the searches referred to in the title, the solutions are the seizures—seizures of the guilty.

Theft, impersonation, kidnaping, adultery, bombing, and murder as well as humor and horror, ghosts and gumshoes, madness and manipulation all appear in this volume, offering the reader hours of suspense and suspension of disbelief, days of entertainment and escape. Among the noted authors represented are Stanley Ellin, Dick Francis, Michael Gilbert, Ed Hoch, Dorothy Salisbury Davis, Hugh Pentecost, Robert L. Fish, Ruth Rendell, Julian Symons, and others.

AMATEUR HOUR, by Robert Hardin. Bobbs-Merrill, $8.95.

The San Francisco Bay area has been terrorized by a series of Jack-the-Ripper murders. In every case, the victim had reported an assault to the Police Rape Division just before her death. Ralph Rodriguez is identified by the most recent rape victim, Wendy Horn, as *her* rapist. He works in the Rape Division, has access to the girls' addresses, and is fingered as the Ripper. When Wendy Horn is killed, it is clear that Rodriguez could not have done it. The murderer, instead, is someone absolutely bizarre in the annals of crime fiction.

THE JAPANESE CORPSE, by Janwillem van de Wetering. Houghton Mifflin Company, $7.95.

Written with "pace, freshness and laconic precision" is what *Time* has said of van de Wetering's wonderfully appealing novels about the Amsterdam police force, and here again are those antic and gentle detectives De Gier and Grijpstra ("excellent company" according to the Chicago *Daily News*), whose Buddhist-like philosophy provides a welcome change from the more usual macho violence. This latest case involves a murder in an Amsterdam suburb, apparently the work of the dreaded yakusa—a Japanese version of the Mafia—and the chase quickly leads far afield to the holy city of Kyoto and a very sinister and spooky cat-and-mouse game. Selection of the Detective Book Club.

THE WINNOWING WINDS, by Ann Marlowe. Dodd, Mead, $7.95.

Deirdre Sheridan arrives to begin teaching in the glamorous Alpine resort of Gstaad, hoping to forget the recent tragic deaths of her father and brother. But when a series of accidents nearly kills her prize pupil, the heir to the sheikdom of Qaiman, Deirdre suddenly realizes she is right in the center of an evil plot—and murder.

"A Swiss ski instructor, a school parent from Texas, the handsome uncle of the Qaiman children provide love interest and intrigue in this drama that climaxes chillingly during a torchlit downhill ski run." —*Publishers Weekly*

"An appealing novel of romantic suspense."—*ALA Booklist*

"Suspenseful and well written." —Barbara Michaels

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a "strange" story by

GERALD KERSH

Gerald Kersh's "Trip Out on Red Lizzie" first appeared in the January 27, 1968 issue of "The Saturday Evening Post." Here is how the editors of the SEP introduced the story: "Did this little man truly belong on a star nine quadrillion miles away from the planet Earth? I suppose I will never know. But if he didn't make it home— Oh, he did! He did!"

Don't blame Detective-Inspector Shropsall of Scotland Yard. After all, it was a case involving "transcendental empathy." (The disappearance of Jackson would have baffled Sherlock Holmes!) . . .

TRIP OUT ON RED LIZZIE

by GERALD KERSH

Once in a blue moon, inquiring after somebody reported as lost in London and last seen in the vicinity of the British Museum, the police would send a plainclothesman on a bicycle to look in at Busto's apartment house, much as they might have glanced into a disused well or dragged a pond—perfunctorily, as a matter of routine. Otherwise, they ignored the place. Nobody whom anyone wanted to find was likely to be found at Busto's.

The sort of people who rented his sad little furnished rooms mostly arrived unnoticed, stayed pseudonymous, left unregarded, and were never missed. The very fact that anyone had come down to living there generally meant that he was well on his way out of sight and out of mind. This was his last chance to be private, one step this side of the flophouse; the last stop before "No fixed abode, no visible means of support" on a police charge sheet.

In my time the only notorious character in the house was one Mr. Nash, an unfrocked clergyman—a much-wronged man, and determined to be martyred as such. A militant moralist, he had

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carried the war against vice right into the adversary's camp. Taken in the flank while on tactical reconnaissance in the park after dark with a girl who sorely needed saving, he was preposterously charged with indecent conduct and stripped of his living by a clique of envious prelates; he sued his bishop and lost.

Now he spent his evenings on a little portable rostrum, publicly denouncing the bishop in the most defamatory terms and daring the police to arrest him. But they had orders not to touch him. He was one of my neighbors on the top floor where, by a cunning arrangement of homemade fiberboard partitions, Busto had made three "single rooms" out of an attic. In these paper cubicles we kept up an elaborate pretense of living in separate apartments—as if we couldn't hear one another breathing—and regarded privacy as sacred. Mr. Nash, in particular, was the soul of delicacy.

I was astonished, then, when he came into my room half dressed and without knocking at eight o'clock one morning and, buttoning his canonical collar and dickey with trembling hands, said, "I think it's happened. I've forced the primate's hand at last!" It appeared that the previous afternoon on Tower Hill, he had called the Archbishop of Canterbury, among other things, a Caiaphas, a dung beetle, a Pilate, a lickspittle, and a hypocrite.

(*"Poor old Nash went on the bash/Under the old oak tree,"* chanted the hecklers.)

"And now guess who's downstairs," he said, trembling with excitement. "Detective-Inspector Shropsall of Scotland Yard, and a sergeant! Thank goodness you're here—I want to be arrested in your presence." I protested that I would rather be left out of it, and Mr. Nash admonished me with, "As an honest man, you ought not to be afraid of policemen."

"I am an honest man because I *am* afraid of policemen," I replied, putting on my coat; but the detectives and Busto were on their way upstairs.

Bounding out to meet them on the landing, Mr. Nash squared his shoulders, planted his feet, and cried in a voice of brass, "Gentlemen, here I am, and I reiterate—"

But the Inspector brushed him aside with a brusque "Excuse me," and turned his head to ask Busto, "Which is his room?"

"Yes, sir, gentlemen, room ona right," said Busto, vilely obsequious. "Ona right, *padrone*."

To our astonishment, the policemen went to the third room, which was rented by the most inoffensive man in the world, a

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pavement artist who called himself Jackson.

"I defy you to do your damnedest!" roared Mr. Nash, shaking his fists in the visitors' faces. "Sniveling myrmidons of Barabbas!"

The Inspector clucked, "Tsk, tsk, tsk! And you a Bachelor of Divinity. Carrying on like Marie Corelli on a tiger-skin rug!" To me he said, "Stick around, will you?"

I followed them into Jackson's room, which was as clean and bare as a hospital cubicle. There was a bed made up taut as a drum, a tiny washstand, a chair, and a small table. Nobody ever saw an emptier furnished room.

"Nothing much here," said Shropsall, finding in the cupboard only a threadbare overcoat and a pair of cracked boots. Shropsall turned to me and said, "Weren't you friendly with Jackson?"

"Were? Is he dead?"

"Well, are—if you like. Eh?"

"On speaking terms."

"As far as you know, did he ever conduct any chemical experiments, or anything of that sort?"

"Not unless you count cocoa as a chemical. He mixed a lot of that. Why?"

"I'll ask the questions, if you don't mind. This man Jackson—I'd like you to tell me all you know about him."

I said, "You know more about him than I do. He was out from dawn till dusk at his pitch, chalking pictures on the pavement outside the London and Home Counties Bank in Southampton Row. Last night he didn't come home."

"I know he didn't," said Inspector Shropsall.

Busto said, "Firsta time in five a-year Jackson don't come home regalara-clockwork when pubs shut."

"He was a naturalized British subject," I said, "so there must be some information in the records—"

"Very likely," said Shropsall. "Where did he tell you he came from?"

"Russia. About thirty years ago."

"Did he express any particular political views?"

"Never in my hearing."

"Did you meet any of his friends?"

"Jackson never had any that I know of," I said. "He was about as alone in the world as it's possible to get."

"Where did he hang out, apart from here? Eat? Drink?"

"He breakfasted off cocoa and a roll, carried a thermos of hot

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cocoa with him, and lunched off that and a cheese sandwich at his pitch. At the end of the day he always got something to eat at the little Brown Bear in Red Lion Street, and after that he generally had a few drinks of Lizzie wine at the Bricklayers' Arms in Percy Street. Why are we talking about him in the past tense?"

Ignoring this last, the Inspector said, "He had one over the eight last night, was taken in for D. and D.—drunk and disorderly—and tried to blow up Tottenham Court Road police station this morning."

"Bravo!" cried Mr. Nash; and "Sharrap!" said Busto. I asked, "Blow up the police station? What with?"

"We'll get at what with in due course, if you don't mind," said Shropsall. "Now, have you any idea of what it was that he was in the habit of trying to draw a diagram of? Was it supposed to be a machine? Or what?"

"Machine? I don't know anything about a machine," I said.

"You were in the habit of holding long conversations with Jackson, though, weren't you?"

"We chatted about nothing much."

"What subjects did you discuss?"

"Well, transcendental empathy."

"Not chemistry, politics, engineering, or any allied subjects?"

"No."

"By the way, what is transcendental empathy?"

"I don't quite know. 'Transcendental' means beyond the limits of possible experience; beyond human knowledge. 'Empathy' means projecting your personality into an object and attributing to that object your own responses. It's rather complicated. One needs a special kind of mind."

"Did he leave any parcels with you? Documents? Packages? . . .No? Well, in your conversations together, did he drop any hints or tell any yarns about places he'd been before he came here?"

"Well, let me think," I said.

"We know, for instance, that Jackson never was any common twopenny-ha'penny screever," said Shropsall. He had sized me up and was playing on my artistic temperament; his voice was cozy and confidential. "It's not everybody who can draw a perfect circle or a perfect square without compasses or ruler. And those pictures of his, all in black and white chalk—exact in every detail, and clear as photographs . . .

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"Far-fetched, if you like, but original, you must grant him that," Shropsall went on. "Why a man with an imagination like his wasn't making good money doing illustrations for the magazines is beyond me. No gumption, perhaps?"

I felt that it would have been worse than pointless to say that the man who called himself Jackson was as devoid of originality and imagination as a take-your-own-portrait slot machine, and as incapable of depicting anything he hadn't seen with his own pale eyes, or of deviating by a hair's-breadth from the immediate appearance of it. It would have been positively compromising.

Jackson drew nocturnes, but the cratered landscape he felt himself most competent to depict was lit by two moons. So I said, noncommittally, "A faithful draftsman is what he is."

Of all the people who scrape a living on the sidewalks of a city, the pavement artists are the most curious. I mean the conscientious, hardworking ones who are out at daybreak carefully dusting off the paving stones at their pitches before sketching out their daily picture, which may be a copy of an old master drawn painstakingly, not in pallid penny chalks, but in good, strong-colored French pastels. (For instance, one screever in London has been copying Hals's *Laughing Cavalier* for the past twenty years, brocade doublet and all.)

They have done half a day's work by nine o'clock, to catch the pedestrians on the way to their offices. By noon their picture is finished, except for the extra touches; a shading here, a highlight there occupies them for the rest of the day.

And then they empty their hats of the pennies they have collected, wipe their work away with wet rags, and go home. There is a melancholy symbolism about it all. They are a sad race.

But there was none sadder than Jackson.

He had, as Shropsall observed, a photographic eye and a sure hand, and there was a distinctly illustrative quality about that outlandish panorama he so persistently got down, all sharp black, dazzling white, and subtly shaded gray, on the stones of Southampton Row. There was an irrevocable lifelessness in its jagged promontories of blasted slag; its utterly naked crags and chasms suggested total silence.

Sometimes he was asked, apropos the two moons in the picture, if it was supposed to be Mars. "I don't know anything about Mars," he would reply. An American visitor said it reminded him

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of someplace he'd passed through in Arizona. "I never was in Arizona," Jackson said, "but some of my family were there, sometime back."

One or two people suggested that he was simply copying, from memory, some old half-tone plate out of a book by Jules Verne and putting in an extra satellite for good measure; the more observant pointed out that the curious shadow forms and subtle overlappings of penumbrae could not be twin moons, one gibbous and the other full.

Working with practised speed, he would finish the landscape, which covered three paving stones, in a couple of hours and then settle down to making his diagram, as Shropsall called it. He would draw an exact twenty-three-inch square in four strokes of a stick of black chalk; and a perfect circle of the same diameter inside it, freehand. (A curious newspaperman in the silly season took measurements.)

Starting unerringly from the precise center of the circle, then, he would make a marvelously intricate series of long, S-shaped curves in black and white, right and left, forming a pattern that I can liken only to some hybrid Japanese chrysanthemum refined almost to invisibility.

More than one onlooker offered him money to draw that thing—whatever it was supposed to be—on paper. He simply shrugged and said, "It wouldn't be any good on paper," although he did promise me one evening, over wine, that he'd draw me that landscape of his "on something you can hang up, one of these days."

For he habitually drank more than the few glasses I have referred to in passing. That hellish concoction, which was also known as Red Lizzie and Lunatic's Broth, was in considerable demand in London at that time. It was made by mixing the rinsings of old port casks with wood alcohol and water, and they said of it, in the style of the old gin-mill advertisement, that on this stuff you could get stupefied for sixpence, homicidal for a shilling, and a clean cell for nothing.

Jackson swallowed it by the tumblerful, and its only effect was to make him sad and pensive.

"This stuff has been my downfall," he told me, in the Bricklayers', "but I can't help it; my constitution needs a lot of sugar. Still, drink was the ruination of me."

"What did you do before?"

"Why, nothing at all," he replied.

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"Was that in Russia?" I asked. When he nodded I said, "You don't look like a Russian, somehow."

"Who said I was a Russian? If I was born in a stable would that make me a horse?"

"I can't place you at all."

"I come from—" He named a place with a labial and a sibilant: it sounded something like *Bvénis*.

"Venice?"

"No, *Bvénis*—down there," he said, pointing straight upward.

"Oh, Venus," I said, quite sure that Jackson was drunk or crazy.

"No, not Venus. Nobody comes from Venus."

"No intelligent life there?"

"Far from it. Bvénis—a star."

"Long way away?"

"You know what a light-year is?"

"About six trillion miles, I believe."

"Approximately. Well, by those measurements, Bvénis must be about fifteen hundred light-years from here."

"Quite a trip," I said.

He replied, "Look here. I talk to you because you have got the story writer's mind. You are supposed to enter into the spirit of things. Laugh at me and I will ask you to go away!"

"I merely remarked that a journey that takes fifteen hundred years at the rate of a hundred and eighty-six thousand miles per second is quite a trip."

"You could also figure how long it would take on a tricycle. Who said anything about a rate as slow as light? There are quicker ways of traveling—"

"Einstein says if mass travels faster than light it becomes energy," I said, "and the formula is—"

"Formula!" he cried, staring me down. "Your friend Einstein is a baby; he can't count beyond ten. A Tartar cashier with an abacus knows more in his little finger." He took out his handkerchief and stretched it diagonally. "Say this is a distance. Which is the quickest way from one end of it to the other? Why, I simply drop the end I don't want, and there I am, at the other end. This handkerchief, a mile, a million miles, a light-year—there's no difference at all—it's only distance; one dimension only." He drank, and called for more Red Lizzie.

"If I do *this*," he went on, drawing a line on the bar, linking two

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little puddles of spilled liquor, "that distance, like light, calls for space *and* time to traverse. But the other way—ah, that's the way."

"Rockets wouldn't be feasible?"

"Rockets? Listen to me: no Bvénisian would touch a rocket, or any other kind of machine. You know that picture I draw, the one you like, what you call the Wilderness? It was a garden, once, until we fought a war with machines. Then it was burned away to what you see—like something in a bad dream, as they say. No, no, machines are taboo. When I came here I would not even travel in a steamboat. I took a sailing ship out of Odessa."

"Couldn't you have picked up both ends of the distance and—"

"Didn't I just tell you that this damned stuff"—he emptied half his refilled glass—"was the ruination of me? What would I be doing here if I could have remembered the way home? At the time of the last Exodus, in 1908, I was blind drunk in St. Petersburg, and my people left without me, forty thousand of them. And I am the last Bvénisian left in this miserable little world!"

"Forty thousand!"

"That was the last of us. There had been several Exoduses earlier on."

"And had the Bvénisians been here long?"

"Oh, millions and millions of years, waiting for Bvénis to heal itself and grow green again. What do you suppose you are, and he is"—he pointed to the barman—"and your friend Einstein, and all the rest of you, high and low, but descendants of us Bvénisians? Bvénisians brought intelligent life to this planet. I mean, intelligent life as you know it."

I said, "So I am a Bvénisian?"

He murmured, with some embarrassment, "Well, yes, in a way. But by a *true* Bvénisian, I mean one of the hierarchy. We bred a sort of rabble to serve us as menials . . ."

"If your people were here so long, how is it that they left no remains?"

"Well, we lost two large civilizations that are known in legend as Atlantis and Lemuria. Oh, we have had our setbacks here on earth! For the rest, our practice has always been to send our dead home to Bvénis. Mechanical and chemical technology was forbidden to us. What should there be of remains, then? There are a few stray crumbs—Sumeria, Chaldea, Egypt—nothing much . . . Let's have some more wine."

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At a gulp he swallowed another quarter of a pint of Red Lizzie and muttered, "I need the carbohydrates," and I remarked, "It must have been a formidable operation, getting forty thousand people off the ground."

"It caused some disturbance in the atmosphere around Lake Baikal, in 1908," he said, with a shrug, "and left a scar in the rock—"

"But that was the famous Siberian meteorite!"

"Your famous Siberian granny, sir! Why leap to the conclusion, on hearing a bang and seeing a hole in the ground, that it is the result of an impact—that it has been knocked *in* rather than pulled *out*? When one travels by empathy, a little of the place on which one is standing comes away, too, necessarily. Forty thousand people taking off simultaneously made something of a pockmark, of course."

" 'Travel by empathy,' " I said. "That I don't understand."

"I couldn't expect you to, because there are simply no words in any language I know—except Bvénisi—to explain. How shall I put it?" said Jackson. "An empathic bending of the transcendental? Does that convey it?"

"No, I can't say it does."

"Candidly, it doesn't to me, either . . . Hey, you, man! Some more Red Lizzie, please."

"Allow me to ask," I said, "if that strange diagram you constantly draw on the pavement has any connection with transcendental empathy."

"It is not a diagram, it is an empathic appliance; it is, to one-dimensional conveyance—or teleportation—what the wheel is to a barrow."

"It makes a very handsome pattern, Mr. Jackson."

"Perhaps. But it is inaccurate. If it were accurate it would be invisible, and so would I."

"Invisible?"

"It would enable me to let go of this end of the distance between me and Bvénis, don't you see, for everybody holds both ends of the imaginable distance in his hand," Jackson replied. "And then I should be back with my people. But the combinations are literally infinite."

"I am surprised," I said, "that a man like you should be screeving on the pavement in Bloomsbury."

"But I am a man entirely without resources now," he said, "and

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where and how else in the world could I be provided with the level stone surface that is essential to me, together with uninterrupted working hours and a modest but steady supply of money for my maintenance?"

"It seems so fantastic," I said.

He drank yet another glass of Red Lizzie and asked, "But why? For thousands of years you have believed in mystical passes, secret gestures, magic circles and triangles to raise the devil. And *this* is fantastic?" He made a wry face and shuddered, then said, "Filthy drink! But it put my curves out of my head and is my only hope of remembering them back again."

"What will happen when your drawing is completely accurate? Will there be an explosion?"

"No," said Jackson, "not an explosion, but an *im*plosion followed by an emphatic *pop*. And I shall be home. May that day be soon. Let's drink to it."

"And there's the long and short of it," said Inspector Shropsall, having taken me to a teashop and treated me to breakfast. "Jackson was taken into Tottenham Court Road police station, shouting his head off, 'I've got it, I've got it!' Got what, I wonder. Any idea?" he asked.

"Not a clue," I said.

"He was searched and relieved of seventeen shillings in silver and seven-pence-ha'penny in bronze, a blunt jackknife, a tin of chalks, and a handkerchief. No papers, no matches. Locked up, he began to cry. The jailer, Butterworth, a good-hearted fellow and very popular, brought him a mug of tea and a slice of bread and marge, and told him to try and get a good night's sleep. Butterworth says Jackson had a bit of chalk which must have been overlooked and was screeving on the cell floor.

"Butterworth warned him, 'Make a mess there and you'll have to swab it up,' but he says Jackson only laughed and said, 'I've got it, I've got it.' At two A.M. he was still making patterns on the floor—that kind of zinnia, or whatever it is. Then, at exactly 3:55 A.M., there was a kind of explosion—just like pulling an enormous great cork, I'm told, and a shower of plaster and small rubble."

I said, "Yes?"

"If you can throw any light on this at all, we'd appreciate it. And while we're on it, I'd take it as a personal favor if you just sort of kept this under your hat for the moment. The cell was still

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locked, of course, and nothing was disturbed; except that there was a shallow circular hole just under two feet in diameter in the floor, and other holes of the same size going straight through all the other floors right up to—and through—the roof."

"And Jackson?"

"Gone. Vanished. And there's going to be hell to pay on account of the damage done to the property, and no way of explaining it that anybody can think of. So if you can give us any lead—"

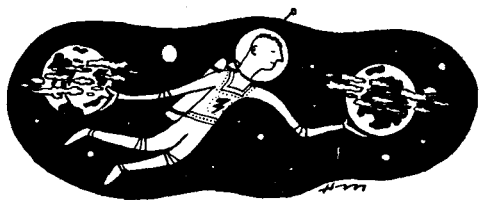
"Considering the quantities of Red Lizzie that Jackson put away, could it have been spontaneous combustion?"

"Is that the best you can do?"

"If I think of anything else more rational I'll let you know, Inspector. Could I have a look at the damage?"

"No. The station is being closed."

So, to the glee of the loiterers in the neighboring backwaters and the irrational satisfaction of Mr. Nash, the red-brick shell of Tottenham Court Road police station was put up for sale. I urged Busto to tender a bid for it, but he said, "I don' lika be conspicuous." Except for an occasional suicide, his tenants gave Shropsall no further occasion to inquire for them in my time.



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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 472nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . The story of two old men, once the best of friends, who had not spoken to each other for forty years . . .

The author, John Rosinski, was in his late thirties when he submitted his first story. He has an interesting and unusual background. "Seven years ago," he wrote, "I took a job as a reading teacher in Florida's largest prison. I practically live at the prison. From my back door I could hit a gun tower with a stone. I like it here, for reasons that are not clear even to me, and I doubt I'll ever leave."

It will be no surprise if we bring you a prison story soon . . .

THE OTHER PISTOL

by JOHN ROSINSKI

"I saw Andy Caldwell at Coker's Drug Store this afternoon and he asked about you," Eileen Potter said just as a fierce soldier rode past in a jeep, spraying demolished buildings with a .50 caliber machine gun.

But Russell Potter kept staring obstinately at the evening news without saying a word. He didn't give a hoot about Andy Caldwell. Not that he gave a hoot about wars in remote lands either, or any of the other disasters that appeared daily in his living room. For many years he had been convinced that the world was going to the devil and nothing on earth could prevent it. He watched the news so devotedly because of habit and the need to assure himself that the final catastrophe lay sufficiently in the future to permit him time to die peacefully at home, preferably in his sleep and with no forewarning.

"Did you hear me, Russell? I said I saw Andy Caldwell this afternoon and he asked about you."

He turned his attention to her with deliberate irritation. "I don't give a damn about Andy Caldwell and you know it."

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"You don't have to snap at me." She gripped the arms of her wooden rocker and glared.

Potter returned his entire attention to the television set and continued to stare. A diplomat had been gunned down on a Paris street as he walked back to his office after lunch.Witnesses said that the gunman had stepped from a doorway and fired several shots into the diplomat's back, then fled around a corner and disappeared in the crowd. The world is being run by madmen with guns and bombs, Russell thought. He nearly repeated the words aloud, but Eileen had heard the observation hundreds of times at just this time of day and in her present mood she would most likely respond with a sarcastic remark.

"I just thought you might like to know that Andy's leaving Evansville and going to live in California," Eileen said in a conciliatory voice.

He heard her words with his customary disinterest before the meaning registered. A chill traveled the length of his spine and continued to his scalp. He was overcome by confusion. When he opened his mouth to speak, he had no idea what he was going to say.

"That's insane. He's always lived right here. He can't go to California," he said hoarsely.

"I didn't think you'd mind so much. You haven't spoken to him in forty years."

He thought that over for a minute. "I don't care what he does. Let him go to hell for all I care."

"I wish you wouldn't talk that way, Russell. It isn't nice, especially at your age," she said.

With some difficulty he crossed his legs. Over the years, crossing his legs had become a signal that he didn't want to talk any more. She could continue speaking if she wanted to, but he wouldn't say another word.

"I wish you would think about talking to him before he leaves. You two used to be such great friends. Just the other day I was thinking of all the fun the four of us had in the old days. Now Betty's been dead twelve years and Andy's moving to California to live with his son. We won't see him again, you know, and soon we'll all be dead and forgotten. It wouldn't hurt you to say a kind word before he leaves, Russell."

He stared at the television screen. Absently he ran his fingers through his thick white hair, always his best feature, and now in

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old age, a source of great pride. With an unconscious smile he remembered that Andy Caldwell was bald and had liver spots on top of his head. Caldwell also wheezed and hacked and couldn't walk a block without stopping for a rest, probably the result of all those cigarettes.

Years ago, not long after he had stopped speaking to Andy, Potter had determined he was going to outlive Caldwell. At first the thought was no more than an amusing fantasy. Then, with no exact purpose in mind, he began to take better care of himself. He gave up smoking and started to exercise. He watched his diet. As he grew healthier, he became aware that he wanted nothing in the world so much as to outlive Andy Caldwell, even if it was only by a single day.

But now that Caldwell was going to live in California there wouldn't be any joy in it. Caldwell dying thousands of miles away wouldn't be the same as Caldwell dying on the next block.

"I remember the time the four of us went to homecoming. You and Andy were so funny down on the field with your pirate costumes. And later when Andy got out of the car to direct traffic and almost got arrested. We had so much fun together back in those days. You remember how much fun we used to have, don't you, Russell?"

She smiled softly at the memory. Her mind's eye looked through the years back to that Saturday afternoon and saw Andy Caldwell with a huge pirate's mustache standing in the middle of an intersection waving a wooden cutlass and finally being led back to the car by a young policeman who called them "ma'am" and "sir." The angle of Andy's drooping artificial mustache, his drunken surprise when he tried to get back in the car and lost his footing, the policeman's amused grin existed like sad reflections in her memory, and for a delicate moment she was young again.

"Do you ever stop to think that there are things no one else on earth remembers except us?" she said when she was old once more. "They're important for no other reason than they happened to you and me and our friends. When we die all those memories die along with us because they're not precious to another soul on earth, and we're precious to each other and to nobody else. Old people like us who've known one another all our lives ought to keep that in mind. We only have each other to share those memories with, and soon we're gone."

Potter tried hard not to listen. Whenever he thought of the

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past, he became angry or embarrassed. Sometimes his mind would uncover a pleasant memory, filling him with joy and bringing a smile, but something dreadful was sure to follow—the face of someone who had wronged him, the superior voice of a feared person, or a vague, painful sensation that made him even more miserable for not knowing the source of it. He looked across the living room at his wife who now sat with her head bowed, smiling at the loose aged hands twitching in her lap.

"You make me sick with your stupid memories," he snarled. "Don't you know I have memories too, and mine are near the same as yours. Andy Caldwell ended that day by throwing up in the shrubbery outside the restaurant where we ate supper. That Andy Caldwell of yours was a selfish loudmouth who never cared a damn about anything but his own pleasure. As far as I'm concerned, we'll all be better off when those memories you love so much are dead and in the grave along with all of us."

She looked at him with pity in her old eyes. "You're an unhappy man, Russell. You've made yourself that way and, God knows, you've tried hard enough to make everyone around you the same way."

He knew it was true. For a brief moment he was afraid he would lose control and begin to sob like a child. He pressed his lips together and fought against the urge to cry out: *You're right. Hate is all I have inside me. I'm old and I know death and I'm so afraid.* But the moment passed. The hate that made him afraid now made him angry, and he needed to hurt someone.

"If I'm unhappy you ought to take a look into the why of it. You come in here bursting with the news that Andy Caldwell's going to California and you get all dewy-eyed when I don't want to run over to his house and hug him goodbye. There's another memory of you and Andy Caldwell that won't be gone until all of us are dead."

He was having trouble breathing and his features were contorted. He looked into her face, enjoying the pain he saw and wondering if he could make her cry this time. Sometimes she cried, other times she got angry and stomped out of the room.

"You haven't forgotten the night of the New Year's dance, have you? I haven't forgotten and I imagine Betty Caldwell remembered right up to her dying day. The two of you so drunk you couldn't even find the right car for your carrying on and after Frank Mayberry's wife found you in the back of their car, the

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whole town knew about you and Andy Caldwell. That's how much fun the four of us used to have back in the old days."

Her face had become perfectly still. "I could have died from shame after that night. I begged your forgiveness. Later I begged Betty's forgiveness, and she gave it. But not you. Ever since that night you've hounded me, just like you were glad it happened. I only wish I had left you then, instead of wasting my life on you."

Slowly she got up from the rocker and left the room. Potter opened his mouth to say something; then realizing with mild surprise that he couldn't hurt her any more, he watched as she walked down the hall and into the bedroom.

Without seeing or hearing he sat through a situation comedy and a quiz show. After the sun had set and only the television screen lighted the room, laughter began to ring in his ears, mocking and belittling him until he blinked several times and saw Archie Bunker excitedly trying to explain something to his puzzled wife. He couldn't grasp the plot which involved an expensive watch Archie had obtained in some shady way. His mind turned to Andy Caldwell. He was probably sitting alone in his house on the next block surrounded by cartons of accumulated junk ready to be shipped to California. Soon the old house would be occupied by strangers from the city who were moving to Evansville in droves.

Life goes on, he thought, even after Andy Caldwell moves to California. He looked on the positive side. Never again would he have to bear the sight of his old enemy. No more Caldwell approaching on the sidewalk or browsing in a store Potter had intended to enter. In a town no larger than Evansville hardly a day passed, even with the most careful planning, when Andy Caldwell did not turn up.

What made the situation even more unbearable was Caldwell's nonchalance. He obviously made no attempt to avoid their meetings, unlike Potter who planned his trips downtown with Caldwell's anticipated movements in mind. Not only that, Caldwell never seemed in the least abashed when they passed on the sidewalk.

Potter never could figure that out, how a man could do what Caldwell had done and go on conducting his life as though nothing at all had happened. Maybe Caldwell didn't have a conscience. Potter had heard of people like that. Suddenly something terrible occurred to him. He tried to brush it aside, but the thought had intruded firmly on his mind and refused to budge:

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how much of his life had he spent thinking about Andy Caldwell? Automatically he started to do a rough calculation but stopped when he realized what the answer would be.

Potter got to his feet and stretched as though he were very tired. His brain had cleared, and he didn't want to sit in front of the television set any longer. It was too early for bed. He walked into the kitchen and looked out the rear window. At a certain angle he could get a partial view of Caldwell's house through an old oak which stood near the sidewalk on the next street.

Light shone through two living-room windows. Caldwell was still awake, most likely puttering around among whatever possessions he considered precious enough to ship to California. At the thought of Caldwell's leaving, Potter felt his heartbeat quicken and instantly his mind made a translation which he spoke aloud: "Caldwell is getting away. He is escaping to California and I won't allow it." Once he heard himself speak, he became certain that he would always be a coward in his heart if he did not confront Caldwell now, before the opportunity passed forever.

Years before Potter had done something so peculiar that he didn't dare look for the reason behind it. One day he took the .38 caliber revolver which he had owned since before his marriage and hid it behind some junk in his garage. Later he told Eileen that the pistol had been stolen from the glove compartment of his car. He reported it stolen to old Sheriff Rhodes and obtained another to keep in his house. Through the years the old pistol no one else knew about fascinated Potter, and he often went out to the garage at night and sat alone cleaning it. On his way to confront Andy Caldwell he took the pistol from its hiding place and put it in his jacket pocket.

There was no moon and the night was chilly. Potter zipped up his windbreaker and plunged his hands into the pockets. His right hand felt the familiar butt of the pistol, worn smooth by years of handling. He slipped through the hedge that separated his property from the Yarboroughs' in back and followed a footpath leading to the street directly in front of Caldwell's house.

In darkness he hurriedly crossed the street to Caldwell's front yard. He intended to walk directly to the front porch, knock on the door, and when Caldwell answered, say something devastating, though he had no idea what that would be. But standing alone in the darkness outside the old frame house, he became as afraid as he had been hundreds of times before when he turned a

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corner in town and came face to face with Caldwell. He noticed that the shade to a living-room window wasn't pulled, and Potter, who hated a sneak, overcame a rising wave of guilt and crept under the window to look inside.

Caldwell was kneeling in the center of the room next to a cardboard box. He had a stack of photograph albums which he was packing inside the box. When he finished, he got slowly to his feet and looked around the room, sweeping his eyes past the exposed window and giving Potter a fright. He removed a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket and lit up. With the first puff he started hacking and for a moment Potter thought he might not make it to the sofa. Those cigarettes are going to be the death of him yet, thought Potter.

Every time Caldwell wanted another puff he had to raise the cigarette with a series of short jerky motions, pausing before his hand reached his lips as though he had to be careful with the final thrust or risk missing his mouth. What a disgusting old man, thought Potter. I could march in there right now and beat him with one hand tied behind my back.

A feeling of physical superiority inspired courage. He walked boldly to the front door and knocked. Too much time passed and Potter was about to knock again when the door opened. Caldwell stood in the light from the living room looking as nonchalant as he had the last time Potter found it impossible to avoid passing him on the street.

"Come in, Russell. I was hoping you would drop by before I left," he said, standing aside for Potter to enter. "Chilly out tonight, isn't it? Thank God I won't have to put these old bones through another bitter winter." Caldwell smiled, rubbing his hands together in a pantomime of enthusiasm. "You don't seem to have trouble with the weather. But then you're in remarkable shape for a man your age. Our age, I mean. I've often wanted to ask how you do it."

"I don't have any bad habits," Potter said. "I look after myself."

Caldwell smiled. "Of course, I should have known that. You always were a man of strong character. Well, have a seat, Russell. Can I get you something, a drink, cup of coffee?"

Potter chose a straight-backed wooden chair. "I wouldn't care for anything."

"I'm just finishing up with the packing. A good deal of my life is in these boxes." From his place on the sofa Caldwell gestured

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toward the cardboard boxes which nearly covered the floor. "About all that's left of it would be nearer the truth, I suppose."

"I've heard about all the sentimental garbage tonight that I care to hear," Potter said.

Caldwell looked at the boxes, then at Potter. "I'm at that time in life when there isn't much left except sentimentality."

"What else are you sentimental about?" Potter said bitterly. "Are you sentimental about that night at the country club?"

"Yes," Caldwell said simply.

"You have some gall," Potter said in a cracking voice. "You make love to my wife so that the whole damn town knows about it and you sit here and tell me you're proud of it."

"Not proud, Russell, just not ashamed. It's been forty years. And like it or not, it's part of my life. It isn't the best part, but it's not the worst part either."

"You're disgusting," Potter snarled.

"You know, Russell, pride isn't much of a virtue when it breaks your life."

"What do *you* know about pride?"

"Not much, I suppose." Caldwell hesitated while he fetched a cigarette from his shirt pocket. "But I can tell you this about pride. Eileen loved you enough to stay with you, even after that became almost impossible. And you kept drawing farther and farther away. That was *your* pride."

"I had every right," Potter said, running his right hand over the smooth butt of the .38.

"I suppose you did. But you've thrown your life away for that right. All because two weak creatures wounded your pride."

"I haven't thrown my life away!" Potter cried, squeezing the butt of the pistol.

"Whatever you say, Russell," Caldwell said wearily.

Potter felt as though he were shrinking. He shouldn't have come here to give Caldwell the opportunity of humiliating him again. There was no dealing with a man who was so indifferent to human decency that he couldn't act with humility. Potter stood up abruptly.

"Don't rush off, Russell. After all, we won't be seeing each other again," Caldwell said.

But Potter didn't hear the words. He only heard the sound of Caldwell's voice, the hated voice that had dominated his life for the past forty years. He pulled the pistol from his pocket and fired

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twice into Caldwell's chest. All Potter saw before he turned his eyes from the slumping body were the surprised look on Caldwell's face and the cigarette dropping from the fingers of his right hand.

He rose, opened the front door with his handkerchief wrapped around the doorknob, then retraced the route he had taken earlier back to his own property. When he arrived at the garage entrance, he realized that he was breathing hard, so he slowed to a leisurely pace so that anyone watching might believe he had been out for an evening walk.

Inside the garage he removed the pistol from his pocket, but before returning it to its hiding place, wiped it free of fingerprints with his handkerchief. That was silly, he thought; it's my pistol and by noon tomorrow it will be at the bottom of the river.

The television screen cast its eerie flickering glow across the living room. Everything else was still. He took his seat and crossed his legs. No fingerprints, no witnesses, and tomorrow the pistol would be gone forever. If Eileen had got up while he was visiting Caldwell, she would have gone straight to the bathroom and then back to bed again.

Everything was nicely taken care of. He had killed Caldwell and got away with it. Killed Caldwell. He smiled as he savored the surprised expression on the dying man's face . . . but what if he wasn't a dying man? What if he lived? Potter got up and went to the kitchen window where he could see the lights in Caldwell's living room through the oak branches. The house looked still. For a moment he considered the possibility of returning to make certain Caldwell was dead, but if no one had heard the shots and thought to call the sheriff, the body wouldn't be discovered until morning, certainly enough time for a weak old man with two bullet holes in his chest to die.

Potter returned to the living room and watched the late news before turning in for the night.

A band of sunlight lay across the quilt when he opened his eyes again. Eileen had parted the curtains before going into the kitchen to make breakfast. Outside a bird sang on the window sill, stirring the sunlight on the quilt when it flew away. Potter remembered that he had been cruel to his wife the evening before. His mind searched for the exact details—something to do with Andy Caldwell's moving to California, followed by another scene about Caldwell and Eileen in the back of the car at the country-

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club dance. Then he had gone over to the next block and shot Caldwell to death. Potter yanked off the quilt and swung his legs off the bed.

I must have been crazy, he thought, but they can't tie me to the murder. He decided that it only remained for him to act natural and pretend that he was ignorant of Caldwell's death. He went out to the kitchen, determined not to act in the least way unusual.

"What's for breakfast?" he inquired in a gruff voice.

"I made pancakes," Eileen said. Her voice was flat. Had she heard of the murder yet?

"Sounds good." He took a seat at the kitchen table. "Coffee about ready?"

She poured a cup, set it in front of him, and said, "Somebody murdered Andy Caldwell last night."

What to say? He didn't want to hesitate too long looking for the best response. "Murdered? Andy Caldwell murdered? How?"

"Somebody shot him to death," she said from the stove.

"My God, right here in Evansville," he said with measured surprise. He wished her back wasn't to him so he could see the expression on her face. Should he say he was sorry old Andy was dead? He didn't want to overdo it.

"Well, he wasn't my best friend, but I hate to hear of him getting murdered like that."

"You haven't got a best friend, Russell."

She put the plate of pancakes on the table and left the room. He thought over her responses as he ate and decided that she had behaved naturally, considering that the victim had once been her lover. He smiled between mouthfuls. Give her time, he thought, she'll get over it. Everything will get back to normal.

He was wiping his plate clean when he heard the front doorbell. On his way into the living room he pulled his robe tight and patted his hair.

Young Bill Rhodes, now the sheriff, stood in the doorway. "Good morning, Mr. Potter. I guess you've heard about Mr. Caldwell."

"Terrible thing. Come in and have a seat, Bill," Potter said, shaking his head in disbelief.

"We don't get many murders around here and hardly any like this one. I mean a man like Mr. Caldwell shot to death in his own house."

Rhodes looked directly into Potter's eyes. He thinks I did it,

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thought Potter. Still, he was glad he sat facing the son instead of the father. Old Sheriff Rhodes knew too much about everything, was a hard man to fool. Potter had never felt intimidated by the son.

"These city people moving in here. The town will never be the same," Potter said with more anger than he had intended.

"Yes, sir, everything's changing. Did you hear anything last night? Gunshots, anything unusual?" Rhodes asked.

"I didn't hear anything out of the ordinary," Potter said carefully.

"It seems nobody in the neighborhood did," Rhodes said, looking embarrassed as he paused. "Mr. Potter, I hope you won't be offended, but lots of folks know you and Mr. Caldwell weren't exactly friends."

"It was no secret," Potter said.

"I know you're not a killer, Mr. Potter. So do folks here in Evansville, but I'd like to be able to satisfy anybody who might think I didn't show the proper official curiosity."

"I want to cooperate any way I can."

"You're registered down at the police station as owning a .38. That's the caliber pistol that killed Mr. Caldwell."

"And you want to see my pistol," Potter said with careful irritation.

"I'd like to have it for a couple of days. Then I could tell anyone you couldn't have done it."

Potter frowned. A little indignation wouldn't hurt. "Of course. I'll get it for you," he finally said.

He went into the bedroom and returned carrying a pistol inside a holster. "I hope this will satisfy the curious," he said.

When he stood next to Rhodes's chair, he removed the pistol from the holster. The butt felt smooth and familiar. Potter felt his body turn suddenly cold and in the next instant so hot that he believed a stroke would surely follow. He looked at his extended hand holding the old pistol that had fascinated him for so many years. Bill Rhodes took it and the pistol disappeared inside his jacket pocket.

"Good morning, Bill."

Potter heard Eileen's voice behind him and turned as she entered the room.

"Morning, Mrs. Potter. We were just discussing Mr. Caldwell."

"How stupid and senseless to kill that old man. But I'm certain

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you're going to find the murderer."

She walked past Potter and sat in the old rocker. He stared at her until he saw the smile forming at the corners of her mouth. Then he turned his eyes to the bulge in Bill Rhodes's pocket.

"I don't suppose you noticed anything strange last night, Mrs. Potter," Rhodes said.

Eileen sat with her head against the back of the rocker. "Last night I sat in the dark looking through the bedroom window. Old people do things like that, you know. Russell went into the garage, twice in fact. He keeps something special out there. I went to bed after he came back to the house and got up early, like always, only this morning I had an extra chore to do."

Rhodes patted the .38 in his pocket. "I'll have this back in two or three days," he said.

He walked to the door. With his hand on the doorknob he turned again to Potter and smiled uneasily. "There is one more thing, Mr. Potter. I've heard that you and Mr. Caldwell hadn't spoken in forty years. I never knew why you two were such enemies, and to tell the truth I've always been curious."

Potter felt sticky perspiration all over his body. "It was something silly that seemed to mean everything at the time," he murmured.

"Well, I'll have your pistol back to you as soon as possible." And then he was gone.

Potter turned to his wife, ready to demand an explanation, to make her pay for this latest betrayal, but she sat staring absently at her hands which had begun to twitch in her lap. Potter considered for a moment and decided not to have another scene. There was enough for him to worry about when young Rhodes came back.

"Q"

This is the 473rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a slice out of life, with the simple realism of a case history . . .

The author, Martina Thomas, was twenty-one when she submitted her first story. She is married, has one child, and comes from the mining region of eastern Kentucky. She spends most of her spare time fishing or reading . . .

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WHY IT HAPPENED

by MARTINA THOMAS

The gusty fall wind set the swing on the front porch into motion. It's ghostlike movement brought back many memories of bygone days.

I used to sit in that old swing with Mama every evening and watch for Daddy to come home from the coal mine. I'd run to meet him as he came up the road, covered with coal dust and carrying his grimy lunchbox. He'd give me a dirty kiss, and I'd go to the well, where Mama pumped the water for his bath. We'd carry the old tin bathtub into the kitchen, and while Mama heated the water, Daddy would tell about his day in the mine.

When the water was warm, Daddy would take off his steel-toed boots, and that was my signal to leave the room. I'd usually go outside and watch my brother Tom filling the coal buckets for the night. By the time the buckets were filled, supper would be waiting. After supper we all sat in the living room in front of the heater, shivering behind and a little too warm in front. Bedtime was early because Daddy worked from dawn till dusk, in order to support us.

As I grew older, I began to realize why my mother sat and waited for Daddy. She was afraid he might not come up that road. Every day he crawled into the dark cold earth and worked on hands and knees with a pick and shovel—for twenty dollars of scrip that he was paid each Friday. The scrip could only be spent at the company store, but it had everything from groceries and household goods to sacks of feed—the sacks my dresses were made from.

I watched Daddy become a tired old man at 45. He forbade my brother Tom from entering the mine. He'd say Tom was too smart to work in a hole in the ground, but Daddy never gave it up himself.

On summer days I'd walk up to the tipple and talk to him while he had lunch, and over the roar of the coal sliding down the chute he'd tell me about the inside of the mine, about how they used blasting caps and powder to free the coal from its mother earth.

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The porch swing creaked and groaned and I thought of the time I'd sat there with Bill on moonlit nights. Most of our courting hours were spent in that swing. Bill and I were married soon after Daddy passed away, and we just stayed on with Mama.

Jobs were hard to come by, so Bill went to work in the mine. Things were better for Bill. He worked only twelve hours a day, and he brought home $48 a week in money instead of scrip. Soon I was sitting in the swing with my own son waiting for Bill to come up the road, and like Mama I felt the fear in my heart.

From the time Bill Junior could talk, his father forbade him from working in the coal mine. It became an obsession with Bill until I promised him that our son would never toil on hands and knees digging coal.

Bill Junior was twelve when my fears were realized and I became a widow at 31. The blasting had caused a cave-in, killing 23 men. The widows received meager pensions to compensate for the lives of their men and with which to raise their children.

I'd sat in that swing just last night with Bill Junior. At 20 he looks a lot like his father. He'd wiped away my tears as he tried to explain. "Mom, Jennie and I are getting married next month. The only job I can get is in the mine. Besides, it's not half as dangerous as it used to be, and they're paying fifteen dollars a day now."

My only answer was the kiss I gave him before he walked away.

I looked once more at that old paint-chipped swing, and went into the house. It was getting chilly, so I picked up a sweater along with Bill's old carbide light. I walked down the road to the mine and slipped by the guard, and into the mine. It was so dark, like a dungeon—a dungeon for the poor men who toil in the darkness to put food on the table for their families.

I lit the carbide light and walked until it became necessary to crawl. I sank slowly down to the cold damp earth. I would keep my promise to Bill. Our son would never work in this mine. I whispered thanks to Daddy for telling me how to use blasting caps and powder.

"Q"

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Suppose detective prowess were a kind of allergy. Could it be contagious?

THE LANDLADY'S JOURNAL

by SONORA MORROW

Dear Ellery Queen:

I have never written a letter to an editor before and wouldn't be doing it now, except that James, that's my husband, thinks I should. He reads your magazine every month and he says you will know what to do with what I have.

I think I should explain that I came from England in 1940 when I was 15. My parents wanted me to be safe and sent me to live with an aunt in Connecticut. I stayed there for five years during which time I met and married James. I've only been back to England twice since and I'm now an American citizen.

Anyway, my mother passed away last month in London and among her effects sent me by the solicitors was this journal which had belonged to my grandmother. Her sister, my great-aunt Martha, had kept it from 1883 until her death in 1926. I'd heard about it—it was a sort of family treasure—but had not seen it until now. James says I should copy the first entry and send it to you and you will let me know what to do about it.

So here it is and thank you for your time.

Most sincerely,
Erica Barry

April 7, 1883

The gentlemen have left again, without so much as a good-bye, but the poor young lady they accompanied looked so distraught that I silently wished them Godspeed and success.

I find it hard to believe they have occupied my upper rooms for nearly two years now. But I must confess they have enlightened the dull life I led since my poor Albert's untimely death. Since all he left me was this dwelling on Baker Street, no insurance and very little funds, I decided to take in lodgers.

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My first ones were two maiden ladies, for propriety's sake since I am a lady alone, and such a bother were they! The tea was never hot enough, the biscuits never soft enough, the rooms never warm enough or clean enough. I was not sorry to see them go when they inherited a bit from a 94-year-old aunt and left to occupy her cottage in Surrey.

When Dr. Watson and his friend, Mr. Holmes, looked at the rooms and wished to engage them, I threw propriety to the winds. Men do not fuss, and let the neighbours think what they wish was my feeling.

I must confess the odd hours they kept, the strange-looking visitors they had, the occasional revolver shots I heard, and the chemical odors that emanated from their rooms upset me in the beginning. But they paid a handsome rent, both were so kind and courteous, and when I found out Mr. Holmes was a detective genius, I decided that I was a very fortunate landlady indeed.

In any event, as I have said, on the above date, the gentlemen had left hurriedly and I settled down in my own quarters for some peace and quiet. I retired early and slept well, until a loud banging on the front door awakened me. It was not my tenants, I was sure, more likely some soul in distress who needed them. I put on my slippers and dressing-gown and with candle in hand hurried to the front door and opened it.

A tall, thin young man with a beaked nose and watery blue eyes stood before me.

"Mr. Holmes, please, I *must* see Mr. Holmes at once!" he cried.

"Mr. Holmes is away," I said calmly.

"I am lost if he will not help," the young man sighed. "When will he be back? Where is he? I'll go anywhere to see him."

He seemed in such a state that I took pity on him and invited him into my kitchen. I persuaded him to sit down and I put the kettle on. While I was waiting for it to boil, I sat down at the table with him.

"Perhaps if you can tell me your problems?" I ventured.

"A gross injustice is about to happen. A murderer will go scot-free and benefit from his crime."

"Why don't you start at the beginning, Mr.—Mr.—?"

"Forgive me, madame," He wiped his forehead with a white kerchief. "My name is Jeremy Coggins. I'm a clerk at Wembly and Wembly, Insurance Agents, on New Cavendish Street, just a short way from here." He smiled feebly. "I always felt—well, sort

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of honoured to be in the same neighbourhood with the great Sherlock Holmes." He put his hands to his face and rested his elbows on the table. "I never thought I would need him so much."

The kettle began to boil and I rose to make the tea. I arranged the tea things and got out some buns. Hot tea and something solid usually helps calm the nerves.

When I had persuaded him to drink some tea and nibble at a bun, I said, "Now, why don't you start at the beginning?"

He sighed again. "I've been with Mr. John and Mr. Alfred Wembly for nine years. They took me on when I was but sixteen and have been very good to me. As time went by they relied on me more and more. They're in their seventies, you understand. Anyway, one day nearly a year ago when the gentlemen were away, a man and his wife came in to purchase life insurance policies on each other. Beggs their name was.

"I didn't take to him at all. He was too handsome, too foppishly dressed and too glib, but she hung onto him as if he were the only man in the world. The forms they filled out showed him to be thirty-eight and her to be forty-five, though I believed she was subtracting some ten years—however, that was her affair. I felt queer about the whole thing, but the insurance amounts were large and they gave me a cheque for a year on each policy. A very large amount of money it was and to be truthful, the Wembly gentlemen had not been doing too well of late. I knew the premium would mean a great deal to them and they seemed pleased when I told them about it."

He paused to finish his cup of tea and I refilled it. It was well past eleven, but I wasn't tired, just exasperated waiting for him to get to his problem. I longed for Mr. Holmes's ability to know all about a person and his problem just by his or her fingers, boots, dress, accent, and goodness knows what all.

Mr. Coggins continued, "I fancy I let my imagination run away with me, but to me Mr. Beggs seemed the kind of man who loved money and would not let a small thing like murder keep him from it. I had sold him the policy that might be an incentive, so I salved my conscience by keeping track of the Beggses. Two months ago I learned that Mrs. Beggs was ill and confined to her bed. I called upon her attending doctor, explaining that our company was her insurance agent and asked the nature of her sickness. He told me it was severe anemia, but that he felt she would get better."

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"And you felt that her husband was poisoning her?" I asked.

He nodded. "I determined to keep a close watch on her condition and if she died, we would demand a post-mortem. But—but—" His voice broke. "If only I had warned her!"

I could think of nothing better to do than to pat his hand. I had already filled him with tea and buns.

He pulled himself together. "Yesterday morning at three A.M. Mrs. Beggs was burned to death in a fire that gutted her bedroom and most of Mr. Beggs's, who slept in a room next to hers with an open door between."

"Was there no nurse?"

"Only for the daytime. Mr. Beggs took care of her through the nights. By all rights their whole house should have burned down, but a passerby saw the flames and alerted the fire brigade."

"So you think he drugged her and set the place afire to kill her? Was Scotland Yard notified?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, wherever there is a dead body or a suspicion of arson, a Yard man checks it out."

"And?"

He snorted. "Accidental death probably caused by her reaching for water or a pill and knocking over the kerosene lamp on her bedside stand. Mr. Beggs said when he awoke the flames were so high he couldn't get into her room and was forced to run outside when his own room became aflame."

"It could be true," I said.

"But it isn't, it *isn't*," he protested violently. "If Mr. Holmes would look at the rooms, meet Mr. Beggs, *he'd* know, *he'd* discover the truth."

The clock struck twelve. And suddenly I was tired.

"Mr. Coggins, you go home and get a good night's sleep. Come back about nine o'clock in the morning, and if Mr. Holmes hasn't come back, *I* will accompany you to the site of the fire. I can tell my observations to Mr. Holmes when he returns and perhaps he will be able to help you."

"Yes, yes. I couldn't wait here for him?"

I stood up and shook my head. "I think not. You return in the morning."

After he left and I had settled down in my bed, I found sleep elusive. If I did go to the site of the fire, what should I look for? What would Mr. Holmes look for? The clock struck two before I dropped off.

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I awakened at my usual hour of eight, washed, dressed, and put the kettle on. I then went upstairs to see if the gentlemen had returned. They had not.

Promptly at nine, Mr. Coggins was at the front door.

I could do nothing but accompany him. He had a hansom waiting outside and within half an hour we drew up before the Beggses residence. It was a dwelling not unlike my own, a common style in London, except that the windowpanes were broken on the first-floor windows and there were black scorch marks on the outside of the windows.

A constable stood outside the door. Mr. Coggins introduced himself as the insurance agent and we were passed into the hall. It was undamaged except for a few small puddles of water. We went up the stairs to the bedrooms.

Mrs. Beggs's quarters had not been large, a room perhaps 18 feet by 18 feet. The bed was totally destroyed, the floor a mixture of wet ashes and scraps of what must have been a fine Persian rug. The only other furniture—a bedside table, a dressing table, and a large wardrobe, all of solid mahogany—had been slow to burn, but were damaged beyond repair. One of the wardrobe doors was hanging askew and I glanced inside. Her clothing had burned off their hangers and the rubble on the base yielded nothing but a few bright buttons and several metal cloak fasteners.

"It does smell of kerosene," I said, sniffing.

"He probably poured it all over everything to make sure of a good blaze," said Mr. Coggins.

We picked our way through the open connecting door to the room of Mr. Beggs. It, too, had been badly damaged. A trifle smaller than the other bedroom, it had contained a bed, nighttable, and wardrobe. Again I sniffed.

It smells of kerosene in here too, and it shouldn't, I thought to myself. Since Coggins was already convinced that Beggs had poured kerosene like syrup over the entire floor, I didn't wish to start him up again. And if Scotland Yard wasn't suspicious, what could I possibly contribute? I longed for Mr. Holmes's presence even more than did Mr. Coggins.

I looked round the room, checked the partially burned wardrobe, noted the broken windowpanes, the almost total mess.

"Let's leave, Mr. Coggins," I said. "I will tell Mr. Holmes everything I've seen, smelled, and thought. I feel as you do, that something is wrong, but I can't put my finger on it."

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Dejectedly, Mr. Coggins followed me down the stairs. And then I realised something I'd seen and had not attached any importance to. As we passed the constable outside the door, I asked him, "Has Mr. Beggs been back since the fire?"

He touched his helmet. "No, ma'am." I'm only here to prevent vandalism and no one has been here."

As we entered the waiting hansom, Mr. Coggins slumped onto the seat.

"Take us to Scotland Yard, driver," I ordered and sat back exceedingly satisfied with myself.

Mr. Coggins leaned forward. "Scotland Yard, madame? Whatever for?"

"I think I saw something that may well put Mr. Beggs in the dock and save the Wembly brothers a good sum of money," I replied.

"I saw everything you did and couldn't find a thing against that murderer."

I kept my silence. We arrived at Scotland Yard and I asked for Inspector Lestrade. He had only passed me briefly at 221B and had thanked me when I'd brought refreshments to the gentlemen's rooms, but I expected to identify myself and my connection with Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson and at least be listened to politely.

And I was. I will not go into the preliminaries, but I did explain the Coggins-Beggs problem and what I had discovered.

"There was one thing that I didn't notice at once, Inspector. Mrs. Beggs's wardrobe had rubble of clothing on the base of the wardrobe and buttons and cloak fasteners, but Mr. Beggs's did not. If the hangers were bare and there was not a button or metal remnant of any kind, doesn't that mean the foppish Mr. Beggs had removed the contents of his wardrobe prior to the setting of the fire? And doesn't that mean he *knew* there was going to be a fire, probably because he was going to set it?"

Mr. Coggins was actually smiling and the Inspector nodded his head.

"I see that living with Mr. Holmes has been of benefit to you, dear lady. You are indeed observant and I congratulate you."

Pleased with myself, I said, "And don't forget the kerosene smell where it should not have been."

There was a bit in the paper on 9 April about the arrest of

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Courtney Beggs for arson and the murder of his wife.

This afternoon a deliveryman brought me a beautiful bunch of flowers and a lovely box of candy from "a grateful admirer, Mr. Jeremy Coggins."

And my gentlemen came home, well satisfied, as always, with the solution of a difficult problem.

I wondered to myself at great length whether I should mention my adventure to Mr. Holmes.

But I didn't. And they do go "away" so much that I may get another opportunity to help someone. And you can be sure if *I* can't, *he* will!

DETECTIVERSE

SURE-LOCK HOLMES

by BARBARA YARBURY FILAN

Said a man who'd caught burglars before,
"They'll not sneak in my house any more,"
But he sealed it so tight,
When he came home that night
He was forced to break down his own door.

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

John Vineyard's first story, "Avalanche Alley," appeared in the April 1977 issue of EQMM—a tense and taut story of mountain climbing. Mr. Vineyard's second story is a different dish of mettle—oops, a kind of spoonerism—a different kettle of fish. But, in its own way, it is just as tense and taut . . .

TWO TURKEYS IN A SNOW-DRIFT

by JOHN VINEYARD

I don't give a damn. It was my operation, and he barged in uninvited, so why should I care? There's only one thing I hate more than a moocher, and that's a moocher who thinks he has a right to tell me how to run things.

This is my operation. My territory—the highways of upstate New York. My tool—a CB radio. I cruise the Interstates monitoring four or five channels until I pick up a distress call from somebody well off the beaten path. I answer and show up first. I hop out and offer a hand until I see whether they're helpless enough, then I relieve them of their money and radio.

The beauty of it is, it gives me a good chance to look them over before deciding whether to make my move. Out-of-staters I like. Kids I like. And old people. They may get my license number, but it's easy enough to change plates. I have a metal press in my basement. And registrations are easy. Now for every turkey I pluck there's about three or four others I help. I always figure I work for what I get.

One day I was driving along Route 81, about twelve miles south of Syracuse, when I got a call that sounded promising. I was in the heart of the Snow Belt. It was about 3:30, getting dark, and starting to snow like it meant to all night.

"Hey, good buddy, this is Salty Dog. I'm in a ditch out here on

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the Pericles Road, right up to my ears. Haven't seen a car in twenty minutes. Can anybody pay me a visit?"

"I read you, Salty Dog. This is Willy Wisp coming in. What's your twenty?"

"About five miles east of Pericles in the eastbound lane. I'm a 1976 green Audi with skis on top and PA plates."

"Ten roger, Salty Dog. Hang in there. Over."

I swerved, got off at the Pericles exit, and passed everything on the way. I know how to drive in snow. It was coming down real good, visibility about a hundred feet, and I plowed into that night like it was my own back yard.

There they were. Audi was standing in the road with a weak flashlight and a handkerchief, squinting towards me, and I could see her blonde hair gleaming inside the car in the overhead light. I could read the brand name on the skis—cost over three hundred bucks a pair. Everything was "go" so far—they were stuck, out-of-state, probably just arrived and still carrying all their money for a big weekend, and the guy with a girl he'd worry about protecting.

I pulled up behind them, leaving my headlights on so I could see their faces but they couldn't see mine. "Hi." I checked out the rear wheels, both hanging over the ditch. "Yeah, you're really in good. You're gonna need help." It never pays to sound too intelligent. This keeps them unwary. "Got a rope?"

"No, just a bucket of sand." He's about 23, straight blond hair like his young lady, with a hint of arrogance like he's just out of law school.

"Where you headed?"

"Itaskany Mountain. You know the lodge there?"

He was impatient. I said yeah, knowing I had to get her out in the open before making the final decision whether it was go or no-go. "Doesn't the young lady feel like helping?"

"Do you need her too?"

"Sure do. Ask her to come out."

"Susan?"

"What?"

"Come out and give us a hand."

She wore a fuzzy parka, with fur trim around the wrists, throat, and hips. Funny. I peg him as a committed liberal constitutional-law type. Makes his living defending the constitutional rights of people like me. An interesting partnership, I thought.

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"Okay," I said, taking a quick look-see up and down the road. "Everything's going to be fine. First I want you both to turn around and grab the tips of your skis, one in each hand, and hold on tight."

"What for?" said Audi, confused.

"That's a very intelligent question. So I can take your wallet." I slipped my hand into my coat pocket.

"How're you going to make me?" he said.

"The gun in my pocket says you're gonna."

"Oh, damn," said the girl. He shrugged. They turned and clasped their ski tips. I fished out his wallet, grabbed her purse, and thanked them.

"Now listen carefully. You, lady, I want you to buckle yourself into the driver's seat. Now. Give me your keys."

"This is stupid. Do you expect to keep doing this without getting caught?" she said.

"Yes, ma'am. I have so far. Now get in." She did. "And you, fellow, climb in the other side and undo your radio. I want your radio."

What can the turkey do? He follows instructions, his eyes kind of steamy-red and furious, half blind with that helpless anger they get. But he knows my kind. He knows the best he can do is smile and hand it over. Then nobody gets hurt. When he's inside he says, "I don't know how to take it off. Why don't you do it?"

"No way. You got a Commando DGT? Right. There's three nuts under the cigarette lighter. Use this." I handed him a small combination wrench with a wire cutter on one end. "Unscrew the nuts and cut the black and white wires. Then hand it to me." I was standing in the snow, almost covered now. It was a heavy wet snow.

He dug at the radio clumsily, nervously, too nervous. I told him to take it easy so he wouldn't get hurt, but it began to look like he was stalling. "All right, I want it now!" He blundered some more.

Then coming our way I saw a pair of headlights. I had a funny feeling. They were about 200 yards away, coming slow in the heavy snow. A State Trooper cruiser.

On impulse blondie reached quick and blinked her headlights. "You dumb dame! Now you've got to do something difficult. You're going to explain everything to that bear and not let on what's happening. You're both dead if he suspects."

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I figured there was at least a one-in-three chance they would be good kiddies and protect me. "Remember, the system made me," I said. "I come from a socially disadvantaged background. Your world gave me no choice but the life I lead. You can put me in jail, but *you're* the real criminals." I read their faces, but I didn't know how it would go.

The cruiser stopped, lights on us, and one State Trooper got out with his flashlight and crunched up to the driver's side. "What's the problem?" he said, leaning in.

"There's no prob—" I started to say.

"There certainly is," interrupted blondie. "We've been robbed. He has our money."

"All right, you better show me your license and registration," he said, walking around toward me.

"No problem, officer. Susie is making a very unfunny joke. I stopped to help them out of the ditch. Here." I handed them over and he examined them. "We were looking under the seat for a length of rope to pull them out. I guess they don't have any."

"We're not authorized to pull anyone out of a ditch. They'll have to call for a wrecker," he said.

The pair got out of the car. "Aren't you going to arrest him?" said Young Lawyer, finally finding his tongue.

"All in due time," he muttered. "Wait here. You, come with me." He grabbed me by the arm and we went back and sat in his car. I had no idea what line to take, just waited for his move.

"All right," he said. "I heard their call and I know about your operation, Willy. I have a hunch I can link you with five other robberies and that murder on the Onondaga Road. You've got a nice operation. I wonder how many more we don't know about. I wonder how much you take a week."

"About five-six hundred," I said, "sometimes a G if I'm lucky. Depends on the number of trucks." I was exaggerating. "You'll have to prove it, though. Say, you're not really a state cop, are you? Easy enough to paint your car to look like a state cop's, get yourself a gray uniform and a Smokey Bear hat. Makes you feel big, hunh?"

"Now don't get nasty," he said. "They were easy, weren't they? Two turkeys in a snowdrift. Let me see what you got."

"I don't have anything. They're lying. I didn't make my move yet." By now the snow had completely covered the windshield, and he turned on the wipers to clear it. The snow was freezing to

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the glass and made a rough grating sound. You still couldn't see out.

"Let me have it," he said, drawing his gun, slowly lifting it towards my nose.

"Okay, okay. Can't win 'em all." I fished into my pocket and handed him the guy's wallet.

He counted out five one-hundreds. "Did pretty good for yourself this time, eh? But I'm onto you now, right? You're going to have to set up in another part of the state, maybe another part of the country, start all over from scratch, unless . . ." He trailed off.

"Okay. How much do you want?"

He took out all the money. "I've been tracing you for three weeks. I know all about you, Willy, where you live, where you operate, and I know who knows you. I can find you any time I need you. Let's say five hundred lets you continue your operation in this vicinity and I don't know a thing."

"Five hundred's not too bad. There, keep it." I tried to smile.

"That's five hundred a week to this address," he said, handing me a card.

"Five hundred a week? How am I gonna buy gas?"

"Eighty-one's a big road. We get a lotta snow. You got the whole county to work in."

I looked up. Through a crack in his window I could see Audi standing outside, watching, overhearing. Over the CB monitor came Susie's voice, calling for help. "You fool, look what you've done!" I said.

"Don't worry. There's nobody in range. Yes or no?"

"Nobody in range? Perhaps you should look again. Ask the young guy standing outside what *he* thinks." Audi was frozen there with eyes as big as saucers.

The fake troopie gave me a blank stare and then made a quick turn. He saw that our whole conversation had gone out over his CB. He kicked it off. The girl was close behind Young Lawyer, probably goading him on.

What followed amazed me. The fake cop twisted and fired twice straight through the window, hitting both of them. Splinters filled the air and wet snowy wind poured in. My ears rang.

"You dumb jerk," I said, "what was that for?" He frightened me. Ladies and gentlemen, for the first time in my life I was scared. I turned slowly, pretending not to be. "I suppose you want the rest of it."

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There was a pale flat look in his eyes, like he'd swallowed poison.

"There's only what she had in her bag over there on the ground."

"Get it. And I want your radios—all of them."

That was too much. Some things I don't allow. I reached to open the door with my right arm, then dug into my left pocket and plugged him three times.

Then it was easy. I put my gun in Audi's gloved hand, pulled the guy in the Smokey Bear hat onto the snow, and dumped him so it would look like there'd been a shootout between them. I left the money in his glove compartment, and left his lights on. In a few minutes the heavy snow would cover all my tracks.

Well, good buddy, that was it. I have another handle now and I've moved my operation to an entirely different part of the country. Ten-four?

"Q"

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a *NEW* Inspector Ghote story by

H. R. F. KEATING

Inspector Ghote, of the Bombay C.I.D., is assigned to keep a sharp eye on Dattu Phadkar, a well-known criminal staying at a tourist hotel in Goa. And into Ghote's field of vision come other visitors—until a dramatic situation develops . . .

INSPECTOR GHOTE AND THE FILM STAR

by H. R. F. KEATING

As Inspector Ghote sat on the terrace of the tourist hotel looking down on the loveliest beach in all the beautiful little State of Goa, he reflected that Dattu Phadkar, the man the newspapers never hesitated to call the Crown Prince of Smugglers, did not at all seem like a big-time operator. Yet none of his own senior officers back in Bombay had believed that the fellow would fly 200 miles to out-of-season Goa except to conduct some huge secret deal. But all Dattu Phadkar was doing was lying on the beach, eating enormous meals and drinking lots of the local liquor, sharp-tasting feni. And he had with him Mrs. Phadkar, a quiet creature never out of a sari, its end usually modestly over her head, the very pattern of the obedient Hindu wife.

Well, Ghote thought for the twentieth time at least, if Dattu Phadkar lazed, it was his own simple duty, sent here to keep watch on him, to laze too. It certainly made life pleasant.

If only it was not for Miss Bhatt. Her widower father's recent death having ended the long years of her devotion, Miss Bhatt was now giving herself a well-earned rest—all except her tongue. And, on duty as he was, the inspector could do nothing to escape that.

"Mr. Ghote, how very very pleasant. May I join you? Ah, I see

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Mr. Kolwar already on the beach, and that nice little Mrs. Kolwar."

"Excuse me," Ghote interrupted, though he knew it would only provoke a renewed spate of talk, "but that is Mr. and Mrs. Phadkar down there. Mr. and Mrs.—Mr. Kolwar and his lady are the other guests here."

"Oh, but I always get things muddled," Miss Bhatt answered, unabashed. "My poor father, it is a wonder that I was not poisoning him with all the different medicines he had to have."

She sat back proudly.

"But look," she said a moment later, "here come the Kolwars now. Or are we not to say 'Mrs. Kolwar'? Ah, what a naughty world it is."

Only Miss Bhatt, Ghote thought, could have believed the bikini-clad film star Lalitha was the legal wife of Mr. Kolwar, the excessively rich ice-cream merchant. No, Lalitha, though she had had long-lasting and well publicized relationships with two male stars, one maharajah, and a famous sitar player, was not the marrying kind. Indeed, she owed her screen success to being known to all but the most unsophisticated as a wicked lady.

"But," Miss Bhatt went on, leaning forward but still speaking in a voice which Ghote was only too well aware must carry well down to the beach below, "there can be no doubt she is most beautiful. They say she is a star, you know."

"Yes," said Ghote. "I know."

"And Mr. Kolwar is so rich. Did you hear him order one of those paans that cost a hundred rupees? And did you hear him chewing it?"

Miss Bhatt laughed.

"Not very educated," she said. "But powerful, you can tell. Not a person to let go when he has something in his grasp. Ah, they have joined the Phadkars. They seem already to know each other well."

"No doubt they were already acquainted in Bombay," Ghote consoled her.

"Ah, yes, the wealthy circles. Of course I could never . . . But, tell me, Mr. Ghote, do you think that here we might join them?"

"No," said Inspector Ghote.

Nevertheless before that day was done he found himself being introduced by Miss Bhatt to the little group. "Mr. Ghote is a civil servant, you know, most senior." And with them was a new vis-

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itor, a hearty Sikh clutching a shiny samples case. "Mr. Singh Anand," Miss Bhatt said, "is a pharmaceuticals representative, for a German firm. I have given many many of his products to my poor father."

Within a few minutes Mr. Singh Anand nudged Ghote heavily and whispered, "Damn fine woman, Lalitha haan?" and before Ghote had contrived to excuse himself to go and sit uncomfortably on watch in the bare lobby of the hotel, he had nudged him again and whispered, even more loudly, "Pretty little thing, Mrs. Phadkar. Too bad."

The import of that last comment, though Ghote did not stay for any amplification, was plain enough. Young Dattu Phadkar seemed decidedly attracted by Lalitha. Indeed, not long afterward, Ghote, shrinking into his hard seat, unwillingly witnessed Mrs. Phadkar signaling urgently, but in vain, to her husband in the bar to come and join her upstairs. But it was not until much later that the party at last went up and Ghote was able to get painfully to his feet.

Alas, he had forgotten Miss Bhatt.

"Mr. Ghote, what a pity you had to leave. You missed some most interesting conversation."

She leaned toward him.

"Though, if you ask me, poor little Mrs. Phadkar left because she was not understanding. We were talking English. Naturally. And she must also learn not to demand from her husband. That is a great mistake in married life."

"Yes," said Ghote. "And good night, *Miss* Bhatt."

Three evenings later the murder took place.

Miss Bhatt had assembled them all for drinks, all except Lalitha, still closeted with her maid. But the party was not happy. Only Mr. Singh Anand seemed wholly content, having installed himself next to the seat awaiting the glamorous, if aging, star.

The place on the other side, between the star's seat and Mrs. Phadkar's, was hotly disputed between Mr. Kolwar and the young smuggler, Mr. Phadkar, each glaring at the other and constantly calling for fresh drinks. Miss Bhatt looked much distressed by this bull-like rivalry—and serve her right, thought Ghote.

But at last Lalitha arrived.

"Somebody get me a feni, please, please!" she called. "I am half

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dead already with that stupid girl."

Both rivals leaped up. But Lalitha's protector was the more cunning.

"Sit, sit," he said. "Take my drink, I have not touched."

"Lifesaver," said the star, lifting the feni and downing it in one series of swallows—only to choke, clutch at her stomach, and be lying dead within two minutes.

The Goa Police inspector, who arrived with commendable promptitude, very quickly learned the details. And when he arrested Dattu Phadkar, he found in his bush-shirt pocket a small bottle of a heart remedy, and clearly written on it was a warning against exceeding the stated dose.

Miss Bhatt, when Phadkar had been hustled out, favored Ghote with her views.

"What a ghastly moment for him. To have decided to get rid of his rival and then have to watch while the deadly glass was handed to the woman he loved. Should he speak and incriminate himself? Should he try somehow to prevent her sipping the fatal brew? And then, before he could utter a word or make a movement—gone! No wonder he forgot about hiding that little bottle. Ghastly."

"Yes, ghastly," Ghote agreed. "But it was not exactly like that, you know."

"Stop, Mr. Ghote, stop."

Inspector Ghote, fresh from a quiet word with his Goa Police counterpart, froze to a halt. It was Miss Bhatt. He had known it would be.

"Mr. Ghote, you are not leaving without telling why you think this terrible business was not exactly as I have said. It is plain to me that Mr. Dattu Phadkar murdered Lalitha. It must be plain to anyone. I saw them find the deadly bottle in his pocket."

"It was put there," Ghote said.

"But it was quite clear that Mr. Phadkar was terribly in love with Lalitha, and Mr. Kolwar was not at all the person to let her go."

"True, Mr. Kolwar would not let go of anything he was wanting."

And, at just that moment, Dattu Phadkar came through the hotel lobby, in freedom, on his way back to Bombay.

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"But—but—" said Miss Bhatt.

Ghote sighed.

"You see," he said, "Mr. Kolwar did not any longer want Lalitha. She is no more young, you know. That is why each and every evening she took so deplorably long to make herself ready. But there is one person here who is young, and pretty also, as even Mr. Singh Anand agreed, though like everyone he felt obliged to flirt a little with a famous star. And that pretty person is Mrs. Phadkar. I am afraid that, for all her appearance of being the good and obedient Hindu wife, she in truth was the wicked lady."

"Little Mrs. Phadkar attracted to Mr. Kolwar?" said Miss Bhatt, in total astonishment.

"Yes. It would have been her who wheedled the medicine from Mr. Singh Anand. But, of course, Mr. Kolwar, when we all turned to greet Lalitha, slipped it into his own drink. He knew that he could easily hand her—you were calling it the 'fatal brew,' isn't it?"

"Yes," said Miss Bhatt.

Ghote took pity on her then.

"But you were quite right about Mr. Kolwar not being educated," he said. "He did not at all know fingerprints, and he broke down as soon as we took his to compare with those on the bottle."

"We took?" Miss Bhatt asked.

"Well, yes, we took," Ghote said. "Appearances are sometimes deceptive, you know. I am actually from Bombay C.I.D."

"Oh," said Miss Bhatt. "Oh dear, oh dear."

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a *NEW* short story by

RUTH RENDELL

Another perceptive probing of the tensions and conflicts that can entwine and enmesh one man and two women. But women would never understand about men and sex, would they? . . . Ruth Rendell proves again that she is one of the finest exponents of contemporary crime writing. Like a surprisingly large number of contributors to EQMM, she has her own "special touch" . . .

A GLOWING FUTURE

by RUTH RENDELL

"Six should be enough," he said. "We'll say six tea chests, then, and one trunk. If you'll deliver them tomorrow, I'll get the stuff all packed and maybe your people could pick them up Wednesday." He made a note on a bit of paper. "Fine," he said. "Round about lunchtime tomorrow."

She hadn't moved. She was still sitting in the big oak-armed chair at the far end of the room. He made himself look at her and he managed a kind of grin, pretending all was well.

"No trouble," he said. "They're very efficient."

"I couldn't believe," she said, "that you'd really do it. Not until I heard you on the phone. I wouldn't have thought it possible. You'll really pack up all those things and have them sent off to her."

They were going to have to go over it all again. Of course they were. It wouldn't stop until he'd got the things out and himself out, away from London and her for good. And he wasn't going to argue or make long defensive speeches. He lit a cigarette and waited for her to begin, thinking that the pubs would be opening in an hour's time and he could go out then and get a drink.

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"I don't understand why you came here at all," she said.

He didn't answer. He was still holding the cigarette box, and now he closed its lid, feeling the coolness of the onyx on his fingertips.

She had gone white. "Just to get your things? Maurice, did you come back just for *that*?"

"They are my things," he said evenly.

"You could have sent someone else. Even if you'd written to me and asked me to do it—"

"I never write letters," he said.

She moved then. She made a little fluttering movement with her hand in front of her mouth. "As if I didn't know!" She gasped, and making a great effort she steadied her voice. "You were in Australia for a year, a whole year, and you never wrote to me once."

"I phoned."

"Yes, twice. The first time to say you loved me and missed me and were longing to come back to me and would I wait for you, and there wasn't anyone else, was there? And the second time, a week ago, to say you'd be here by Saturday and could I—could I *put you up*. My God, I'd lived with you for two years, we were practically married, and then you phone and ask if I could put you up!"

"Words," he said. "How would you have put it?"

"For one thing, I'd have mentioned Patricia. Oh, yes, I'd have mentioned her. I'd have had the decency, the common humanity, for that. D'you know what I thought when you said you were coming? I ought to know by now how peculiar he is, I thought, how detached, not writing or phoning or anything. But that's Maurice, that's the man I love, and he's coming back to me and we'll get married and I'm so happy!"

"I did tell you about Patricia."

"Not until after you'd made love to me first."

He winced. It had been a mistake, that. Of course he hadn't meant to touch her beyond the requisite greeting kiss. But she was very attractive and he was used to her and she seemed to expect it—and oh, what the hell. Women never could understand about men and sex. And there was only one bed, wasn't there? A hell of a scene there'd have been that first night if he'd suggested sleeping on the sofa in here.

"You made love to me," she said. "You were so passionate, it was just like it used to be, and then the next morning you told

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me. You'd got a resident's permit to stay in Australia, you'd got a job all fixed up, you'd met a girl you wanted to marry. Just like that you told me, over breakfast. Have you ever been smashed in the face, Maurice? Have you ever had your dreams trodden on?"

"Would you rather I'd waited longer? As for being smashed in the face—" he rubbed his cheekbone "—that's quite a punch you pack."

She shuddered. She got up and began slowly and stiffly to pace the room. "I hardly touched you. I wish I'd killed you!" By a small table she stopped. There was a china figurine on it, a bronze paperknife, an onyx pen jar that matched the ashtray. "All those things," she said. "I looked after them for you. I treasured them. And now you're going to have them all shipped out to her. The things we lived with. I used to look at them and think, Maurice loves that, Maurice liked that placed just here, Maurice bought that when we went to—oh, God, I can't believe it. Sent to *her*!"

He nodded, staring at her. "You can keep the big stuff," he said. "You're specially welcome to the sofa. I've tried sleeping on it for two nights and I never want to see the bloody thing again."

She picked up the china figurine and hurled it at him. It didn't hit him because he ducked and let it smash against the wall, just missing a framed drawing. "Mind the Lowry," he said laconically. "I paid a lot of money for that."

She flung herself onto the sofa and burst into sobs. She thrashed about, hammering the cushions with her fists. He wasn't going to be moved by that—he wasn't going to be moved at all. Once he'd packed those things, he'd be off to spend the next three months touring Europe. A free man, free for the sights and the fun and the girls, for a last fling of wild oats. After that, back to Patricia and a home and a job and responsibility. It was a glowing future which this hysterical woman wasn't going to mess up.

"Shut up, Betsy, for God's sake," he said. He shook her roughly by the shoulder, and then he went out because it was now eleven and he could get a drink.

Betsy made herself some coffee and washed her swollen eyes. She walked about, looking at the ornaments and the books, the glasses and vases and lamps, which he would take from her tomorrow. It wasn't that she much minded losing them, the things themselves, but the barrenness which would be left, and the knowing that they would all be Patricia's.

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In the night she had got up, found his wallet, taken out the photographs of Patricia, and torn them up. But she remembered the face, pretty and hard and greedy, and she thought of those bright eyes widening as Patricia unpacked the tea chests, the predatory hands scrabbling for more treasures in the trunk. Doing it all perhaps before Maurice himself got there, arranging the lamps and the glasses and the ornaments in *their* home for his delight when at last he came.

He would marry her, of course. I suppose she thinks he's faithful to her, Betsy thought, the way I once thought he was faithful to me. I know better now. Poor stupid fool, she doesn't know what he did the first moment he was alone with her, or what he might get in France and Italy. That would be a nice wedding present to give her, wouldn't it, along with all the pretty bric-a-brac in the trunk?

Well, why not? Why not rock their marriage before it had even begun? A letter. A letter to be concealed in, say, that blue-and-white ginger jar. She sat down to write. Dear Patricia—what a stupid way to begin, the way you had to begin a letter even to your enemy.

Dear Patricia: I don't know what Maurice has told you about me, but we have been living here as lovers ever since he arrived. To be more explicit, I mean we have made love, have slept together. Maurice is incapable of being faithful to anyone. If you don't believe me, ask yourself why, if he didn't want me, he didn't stay in a hotel. That's all. Yours—and she signed her name and felt a little better, well enough and steady enough to take a bath and get herself some lunch.

Six tea chests and a trunk arrived on the following day. The chests smelled of tea and had drifts of tea leaves lying in the bottom of them. The trunk was made of silver-colored metal and it had clasps of gold-colored metal. It was rather a beautiful object, five feet long, three feet high, two feet wide, and the lid fitted so securely that it seemed a hermetic sealing.

Maurice began to pack at two o'clock.

He used tissue paper and newspapers. He filled the tea chests with kitchen equipment and cups and plates and cutlery, with books, with those clothes of his he had left behind him a year before. Studiously, and with a certain grim pleasure, he avoided everything Betsy might have insisted was hers—the poor cheap

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things, the stainless-steel spoons and forks, the Woolworth pottery, the awful colored sheets, red and orange and olive, that he had always loathed. He and Patricia would always sleep on white sheets.

Betsy didn't help him. She watched, chain-smoking. He nailed the lids on the chests, and on each lid he wrote in white paint his address in Australia. But he didn't paint the letters of his own name. He painted Patricia's. This wasn't done to needle Betsy, but he was glad to see it was needling her.

He hadn't come back to the flat till one that morning, and of course he didn't have a key. Betsy had refused to let him in, had left him down there in the street, and he had to sit in the car he'd hired till seven. She looked as if she hadn't slept either. *Miss Patricia Gordon,* he wrote, painting fast and skillfully.

"Don't forget your ginger jar," said Betsy. "I don't want it."

"That's for the trunk." *Miss Patricia Gordon, 23 Burwood Park Avenue, Kew, Victoria, Australia 3101.* "All the pretty things are going in the trunk. I intend it as a special present for Patricia."

The Lowry came down and was carefully padded and wrapped. He wrapped the onyx ashtray and the pen jar, the alabaster bowl, the bronze paperknife, the tiny Chinese cups, the tall hock glasses. The china figurine, alas . . . He opened the lid of the trunk.

"I hope the Customs open it!" Betsy shouted at him. "I hope they confiscate things and break things! I'll pray every night for it to go to the bottom of the sea before it gets there!"

"The sea," he said, "is a risk I must take. As for the Customs—" He smiled. "Patricia works for them, she's a Customs officer—didn't I tell you? I very much doubt if they'll even glance inside." He wrote a label and pasted it on the side of the trunk. *Miss Patricia Gordon, 23 Burwood Park Avenue, Kew* . . . "And now I'll have to go out and get a padlock. Keys, please. If you try to keep me out this time, I'll call the police. I'm still the legal tenant of this flat, remember."

She gave him the keys. When he had gone she put her letter in the ginger jar. She hoped he would close the trunk at once, but he didn't. He left it open, the lid thrown back, the new padlock dangling from the gold-colored clasp.

"Is there anything to eat?" he said.

"Go and find your own bloody food! Go and find some other woman to feed you!"

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He liked her to be angry and fierce; it was her love he feared. He came back at midnight to find the flat in darkness, and he lay down on the sofa with the tea chests standing about him like defenses, like barricades, the white paint showing faintly in the dark. *Miss Patricia Gordon . . .*

Presently Betsy came in. She didn't put on the light. She wound her way between the chests, carrying a candle in a saucer which she set down on the trunk. In the candlelight, wearing a long white nightgown, she looked like a ghost, like some wandering madwoman, a Mrs. Rochester, a Woman in White.

"Maurice."

"Go away, Betsy, I'm tired."

"Maurice, *please*. I'm sorry I said all those things. I'm sorry I locked you out."

"Okay, I'm sorry too. It's a mess, and maybe I shouldn't have done it the way I did. But the best way is for me just to go and my things to go and make a clean split. Right? And now will you please be a good girl and go away and let me get some sleep?"

What happened next he hadn't bargained for. It hadn't crossed his mind. Men don't understand about women and sex. She threw herself on him, clumsily, hungrily. She pulled his shirt open and began kissing his neck and his chest, holding his head, crushing her mouth to his mouth, lying on top of him and gripping his legs with her knees.

He gave her a savage push. He kicked her away, and she fell and struck her head on the side of the trunk. The candle fell off, flared, and died in a pool of wax. In the darkness he cursed floridly. He put on the light and she got up, holding her head where there was a little blood.

"Oh, get out, for God's sake," he said, and he manhandled her out, slamming the door after her. . .

In the morning, when she came into the room, a blue bruise on her forehead, he was asleep, fully clothed, spreadeagled on his back. She shuddered at the sight of him. She began to get breakfast, but she couldn't eat anything. The coffee made her gag and a great nauseous shiver went through her. When she went back to him he was sitting up on the sofa, looking at his plane ticket to Paris.

"The men are coming for the stuff at ten," he said as if nothing had happened, "and they'd better not be late. I have to be at the airport at noon."

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She shrugged. She had been to the depths and she thought he couldn't hurt her any more.

"You'd better close the trunk," she said absent-mindedly.

"All in good time." His eyes gleamed. "I've got a letter to put in yet."

Her head bowed—the place where it was bruised was sore and swollen—she looked loweringly at him. "You never write letters."

"Just a note. One can't send a present without a note to accompany it, can one?" He pulled the ginger jar out of the trunk, screwed up her letter without even glancing at it, and threw it on the floor. Rapidly, yet ostentatiously, and making sure that Betsy could see, he scrawled across a sheet of notepaper: *All this is for you, darling Patricia, forever and ever.*

"How I hate you," she said.

"You could have fooled me." He took a large angle lamp out of the trunk and set it on the floor. He slipped his note into the ginger jar, rewrapped it, tucked the jar in between the towels and cushions padding the fragile objects. "Hatred isn't the word I'd use to describe the way you came after me last night."

She made no answer. Perhaps he should have put a heavy object like that lamp in one of the chests, perhaps he should open up one of the chests now. He turned round for the lamp. It wasn't there. She was holding it in both hands.

"I want that, please."

"Have you ever been smashed in the face, Maurice?" she said breathlessly, and she raised the lamp and struck him with it full on the forehead. He staggered and she struck him again, and again and again like a madwoman, raining blows on his face, his head. He screamed. He sagged, covering his face with bloody hands. Then, with all her strength, she gave him a great swinging blow, and he fell to his knees, rolled over, and at last was stilled and silenced.

There was quite a lot of blood, though it quickly stopped flowing. She stood there looking at him, and she was sobbing. Had she been sobbing all the time? She was covered with blood. She tore off her clothes and dropped them in a heap around her. For a moment she knelt beside him, naked and weeping, rocking backward and forward, speaking his name, biting her fingers that were all sticky with his blood.

But self-preservation is the primal instinct. It is more powerful than love or sorrow, hatred or regret. The time was nine o'clock,

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and in an hour those men would come. Betsy fetched water in a bucket, detergent, cloths, and a sponge. The hard work, the great cleansing, stopped her tears, quieted her heart, and dulled her thoughts. She thought of nothing, working frenziedly, her mind a blank.

When bucket after bucket of reddish water had been poured down the sink, and the carpet was soaked but clean, the lamp washed and dried and polished, she threw her clothes into the hamper in the bathroom and took a bath. She dressed carefully and brushed her hair. Eight minutes to ten. Everything was clean and she had opened the window, but the dead thing still lay there on a pile of reddened newspapers.

"I loved him," she said aloud, and she clenched her fists. "I hated him."

The men were punctual. They came at ten sharp. They carried the six tea chests and the silver-colored trunk with the gold-colored clasps downstairs.

When they had gone and their van had driven away, Betsy sat down on the sofa. She looked at the angle lamp, the onyx pen jar and ashtray, the ginger jar, the alabaster bowls, the hock glasses, the bronze paperknife, the little Chinese cups, and the Lowry that was back on the wall. She was quite calm now, and she didn't really need the brandy she had poured for herself.

Of the past she thought not at all, and the present seemed to exist only as a palpable nothingness, a thick silence that lay around her. She thought of the future, of three months hence, and into the silence she let forth a steady, rather toneless peal of laughter. *Miss Patricia Gordon, 23 Burwood Park Avenue, Kew, Victoria, Australia, 3101.* The pretty, greedy, hard face, the hands so eager to undo that padlock and prize open those golden clasps to find the treasure within . . .

And how interesting that treasure would be in three months time, like nothing Miss Patricia Gordon had seen in all her life! It was as well, so that she would recognize it, that it carried on top of it a note in a familiar hand:

All this is for you, darling Patricia, forever and ever.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Dr. Sam Hawthorne, retired general practitioner, turns another leaf in his memory book and recalls the engrossing details of another "impossible crime," this time in an old country inn in the early summer of 1926—a baffling "locked room mystery." Now, coming up with one solution to a locked-room puzzle is hard enough, but what made this case doubly difficult for Doc Sam was his coming up with a second *solution . . .*

THE PROBLEM OF THE COUNTRY INN

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"Yes, come in," Dr. Sam Hawthorne urged, holding wide the door. "You're just in time for—ah—a small libation—and a story. I think I promised to tell you about the old country inn this time, and about the masked bandit who just might have been a ghost. It was in the early summer o' 1926, just after that affair with the Eel, and at a time when the feud between Whitehead and Carey was still heatin' up. They'd fought a sort of duel, you'll remember, out at Jeff Whitehead's farm, and Eustace Carey, owner of one of Northmont's two general stores, had ended up with a bullet in the thigh . . ."

After Eustace was released from the hospital in Felix (Dr. Sam went on), I checked him over about once a week. The bullet wound in his thigh was healing well, though there was still the possibility of a secondary infection.

I'd just returned from seeing Eustace when my nurse April met me at the door with a message. "Sheriff Lens phoned. He wants you out at the Ferry House. He says there's been a shootin'!"

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"Thanks, April," I said, turning on my heel toward the waiting Pierce-Arrow. It was beginning to look like a busy day.

The Ferry House was the nearest thing Northmont had to a genuine country inn. It was located out on the Post Road at the point where the ferry used to cross Snake Creek. The ferry never ran at night, of course, and travelers used to stop at the inn for food and lodgings before continuing their journey in the morning. The Ferry House had been built in 1802, and it survived into the Twentieth Century, even though Snake Creek is a lot narrower now and a bridge replaced the ferry long ago.

The inn was owned and run by William Stokes, a retired lawyer who'd moved to Northmont with his wife about five years earlier. She'd died of the influenza during my first winter in town, causing a bit of a scare that we were going to have another epidemic like the one in 1919. But except for a few isolated cases nothing came of it. Stokes, a vigorous man still in his mid-sixties, buried his wife out behind the inn and kept right on operating it.

This day, a sunny Monday in June, William Stokes wasn't lookin' vigorous any more. I reached the inn and parked my runabout behind the sheriff's car, and the first thing I saw as I entered was Stokes' body sprawled on the rug by the front desk. There wasn't much blood.

"When did this happen?" I asked Sheriff Lens.

"About two hours ago. I been tryin' to reach you."

"You don't need me. The man's dead."

"That's for sure!" the sheriff said, covering the body again with a sheet. "Shot right through the chest at close range."

I glanced in at the dining room off to the right, where I recognized the inn's room clerk, little Benny Fields, hunched over a shot of bootleg whiskey. There were others in the room too, but I didn't recognize any of them. "What happened?" I asked.

Sheriff Lens tugged his pants up over a spreading stomach. "Benny was gettin' the weekend receipts ready for the bank when a holdup man came in through the front door. Benny says he was wearin' a fringed leather jacket and carryin' an old western revolver. An' he had on a black mask like an outlaw or a highwayman."

I grunted at that. "Benny must have been hittin' the bottle."

"Anyways, Stokes was upstairs and came down right in the middle of this. The bandit took one look an' shot him clean through the chest. Then the bandit heard some people comin' up

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the front walk, so he hightailed it down that hall to the back door."

The hall ran under the stairs leading to the second floor. At one time there had been doors off the hall to the kitchen and a back bedroom, but these doors had been boarded up and papered over long ago. Now the hall led nowhere except to the back door, which opened on a gravel parking area that could accommodate three or four automobiles.

I glanced back at the room clerk's counter where a sack of currency still rested. "He got away without the money?"

"Without the money, but he didn't get away."

"You caught him?"

Sheriff Lens nodded with just a trace of pride. "Benny says the killer ran down that long hall, an' you can see for yourself it leads only to the back door. Trouble is, the door's bolted on the *inside*. Nobody coulda gone out an' left it like that."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean Benny's lying. And I'm arrestin' him for the murder of William Stokes."

I went in to the table where Benny sat and pulled out the chair opposite him. "How you feeling, Benny?"

He glanced up with the frightened look of a trapped animal. "Not so good, Dr. Sam. It's not every day I get accused of murder."

"Tell me what happened, will you? Everything, from the minute you came on duty this morning."

"It was like I told the sheriff. This masked man—"

"Everything. From the beginning."

Benny sighed and started over. "Well, you know we don't do much of a business here any more, 'specially since Prohibition an' all. But we generally have one or two rooms occupied upstairs, and on weekends we do a fair food business. Stokes lived upstairs—alone since his wife died—and so does the housekeeper, Mrs. Adams. I got me a place the other side o' Snake Creek, just across the bridge. Anyways, when I come on at eight on Monday mornings my first job is to open the safe and total up what we took in from dinners over the weekend. Sometimes in the summer like this it's a tidy sum. You get people drivin' out all the way from Boston—"

"How tidy?" I asked.

"It was over five hundred dollars this weekend."

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"How many guests upstairs right now?"

"Just one—a Mr. Smith."

"So the only people in the inn at the time of the robbery—or the attempted robbery—were you and Stokes, plus Mrs. Adams and this Mr. Smith upstairs."

"That's right. The kitchen help don't come in till late afternoon on Mondays." His gaze shifted to a nearby table. "Mrs. Adams tends to us if we need anything to eat before then."

I glanced around, following his eyes, and saw a tall woman with vaguely masculine features. She was drinking a cup of tea and talkin' to one of the sheriff's deputies. "Go on with your story," I said.

"Well, I was just countin' the money when the front door bursts open and in walks this masked man. He was dressed like a reg'lar bandit—fringed leather jacket, black mask, western hat, and a revolver."

"What did he look like?"

"He was medium height, maybe a little taller than me, and he had a bushy mustache that showed under the mask. That's about all I can tell you. Oh—and a little beard too. Coulda been fake."

"Fat? Thin?"

A shrug. "Medium."

"Go on."

"He pointed the revolver at me an' motioned towards the money." Benny trembled as he took another sip of whiskey. "I got his message right off."

"He didn't speak?"

"No."

"Odd. Sheriff Lens said that Stokes came downstairs in the middle of this. What attracted him?"

"I s'pose he heard me talkin', asking this guy what he wanted. Anyways, as soon as he saw Stokes the bandit turned and fired one shot straight at his chest. I ducked behind my counter and then almost at once I heard voices from outside. There were a couple of delivery men comin' in with the week's supply of meat."

"Did they see the killer?"

Benny shook his head. "I wouldn't be in this jam if they had. He turned and ran down the hall to the back door."

"Did you actually see or hear him go out?"

"Well, no—but he musta! I shouted to the meat man that there'd been a shootin' and I started down the hall. But I could

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see he was gone, so we all ran outside. There was no trace of him, and we figgered he'd made it into the woods along the creek."

"See any footprints?" I asked.

"No, but it's all gravel out there, and there hasn't been any rain lately. We wouldn't expect footprints."

"So you called the sheriff?"

"Right. He was here within ten minutes, and he poked around good. I hadn't looked at the back door that close, an' I was as surprised as anyone when he said it was bolted shut from the inside."

"Is it usually kept bolted?"

"Just at night. Stokes generally unlocked it first thing in the mornin', so I just assumed it was open. He must not 'a gotten to it before he was killed."

"So the sheriff thinks you did it."

"Sure! He says where could this masked highwayman have gotten to, and he's right—there's no place!"

"Let's go look at that hall."

The body had been removed, and Sheriff Lens was outside supervising its loading into the town ambulance, a converted World War model that had seen service with the army. I glanced out at the sheriff, then led the way down the back hall. It was a corridor about three feet wide and 20 feet long, with a single wooden door at the end.

As Fields had indicated, it was impossible to see the door from behind the room clerk's desk at this end. The hallway walls were papered with a pattern of faded flowers, water-stained at some spots near the ceiling. The floor was covered with a long single unbroken piece of brown linoleum, effectively ruling out the possibility of a trap door.

I tested the floor anyway, and tapped on the walls with my knuckles. Near the far end I heard hollow sounds in both walls. "What's this?"

"The old door on the right led to the kitchen, and the one on the left to a bedroom converted into a storeroom. Around the turn of the century they were both boarded up and papered over. We use the entrances around the other side for both rooms. This hallway now is just for guests who want to park in the rear."

I could see that the door bolt was in place, and it didn't slide back and forth too easily. The screws holding the bolt to the door, and the screws holding the bolt's metal receiver to the door frame,

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were all tightly in place. I tapped the door panels, but there was no trick exit. The door jamb itself was thickly weatherstripped, so the door opened and closed quietly. Outside there was only the gravel parking area.

I turned to stare at the ceiling. "What's right above this?" I asked.

Fields thought for a moment. "The upstairs hall, with Mrs. Adams' room at the end of it."

"I'll have a look." I returned to the dining room and introduced myself to Mrs. Adams. Her strong features were quite handsome close up, accentuated by the lipstick she wore—she was one of the few women in town who used lipstick and rouge. "You treated my sister-in-law over on the ridge," she said.

I remembered the case—a middle-aged woman with female trouble. Unfortunately I hadn't been able to help her much. "I'm assisting Sheriff Lens in his investigation," I said. "I wonder if you could show me around upstairs."

"All right," she answered, rather coldly.

On the way up the creaky front steps I asked her about their single paying guest. "Was he down in the dining room?"

She shook her head. "Hasn't stirred out of his room. Got the *Do Not Disturb* sign out. Sleeping through all the excitement."

"Seems a bit odd."

A shrug was her only reply. At the top of the stairs she asked, "What did you want to see?"

"Just a general look around. Which is your room?"

"Here." She made no move to open the door.

"Would it be possible to look inside?" I asked.

She eyed me with distaste, then unlocked the door. The room was perfectly ordinary, done in a pseudo-colonial style like the rest of the Ferry House. "Satisfied?" she asked.

"This would be directly over the downstairs hall?"

"I suppose so. I never thought about it."

"You know the killer vanished down there?"

For the first time her grim face relaxed into something approaching a smile. "You think he came up through the ceiling?"

"I've seen things almost as strange." As I walked out of the room I spotted the *Do Not Disturb* sign still in place on the opposite door. "I think it's time Mr. Smith was awakened."

I knocked gently on the door.

No answer.

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I tried knocking harder.

"You'll wake the poor man!" Mrs. Adams protested.

"Did it ever occur to you, Mrs. Adams, that the late-sleeping Mr. Smith could well be the masked killer who vanished so mysteriously?"

"What?" My words seemed to confound her. "But how could that be possible? He was up here!"

I knocked again on the door, and this time a muffled voice answered. "Go away, I'm trying to sleep."

"Mr. Smith, I must talk to you. There's been a murder downstairs."

"Go away!"

But I kept up the pounding, growing more suspicious by the second. If Smith didn't want to be seen, that was all the more reason for seeing him.

Finally I heard the lock turn and the door swung open an inch. That was all I needed. My shoulder hit the door and forced it open the rest of the way.

The man in the room, the mysterious Mr. Smith, was none other than our erstwhile duelist-farmer, Jeff Whitehead.

"Well, Jeff, I'm surprised to see you here," I said, not acting half as surprised as I felt.

"I—I'm glad it's you, Doc. Ever since I heard Carey was outa the hospital I been afraid he'd come gunnin' for me."

"You mean because of that foolish duel?"

Whitehead nodded. "There's been bad blood between us a long time. Even after I shot him he was yellin' the duel was unfair 'cause he didn't get a chance to fire. He swore he had a shot comin', and he said he'd be lookin' for me as soon as his leg was better."

"So you been hiding out here? It's hardly very far away."

"I didn't want to leave the family. I figured if I could just stay here a few days, till Carey got tired of lookin' for me, I'd be safe."

"Does anyone know you're here?"

He shook his head. "I told my son I'd be away for a few days, that's all."

I sat down on the bed, careful not to disturb the smooth spread. "You know, Jeff, you and Carey are both middle-aged men with grown children. It's about time you started acting like adults instead of children. This whole business of the duel was foolish,

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and your hidin' out here is just adding to the foolishness. Go back home to your family, or you'll likely end up in a peck of trouble."

He looked puzzled. "What do you mean? What's been going on downstairs?"

"Didn't you hear the shot?"

"Shot? No—I must have been sleeping. But I thought there was a lot of comings and goings for this place. And I did see the ambulance."

"The owner, William Stokes, was shot dead by a masked bandit who was tryin' to rob the place."

"My God!"

"How well did you know Stokes?"

"Hardly at all. That's why I picked this place to hide out. The clerk didn't know me, either."

"Then you know nothing about the killing?"

"No. I haven't been out of this room since last night."

"All right," I said. "Look, stay here for now. Sheriff Lens is downstairs and I know he'll want to question you, but outside of him I won't tell anyone you're here."

I left him in his room and went back downstairs. Mrs. Adams was standing in the upstairs hall, watching me as I went, but she didn't speak.

Downstairs I told the sheriff about Jeff Whitehead. "Think he's involved in this somehow?" Lens asked.

"I doubt it. I don't see how." But there was another thought stirring in the back of my brain. "What about these men who were delivering the meat, the ones who came in just after the killing? Are they still around?"

Sheriff Lens shook his head. "I questioned them and let 'em go on their way. They had other deliveries to make and their ice was *meltin' fast today. I know 'em both anyway—Tommy* Bay and George Kraft from Northmont Packers. You know, they drive that red wagon around with the big picture of a steer on the side."

"I'd like to talk to them," I said.

"You agree Benny Fields musta killed Stokes? Or do you think this is another one of your impossible crimes?"

"I don't know yet. But would you hold off arresting Fields till tomorrow? He's not going anywhere and maybe by that time I'll have a better idea of just what happened."

Sheriff Lens wasn't happy, but he finally agreed. "All right, Doc, I've trusted you before and I'll do it again. I'll admit that was

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a pretty crazy story for Fields to make up if it's not true. But I can't explain that door bolted on the inside."

"Neither can I."

I drove back to town, following the most likely route of the meat delivery wagon. Finally I saw it parked ahead of me, off the road in front of the pavilion at North Park. I stopped my runabout in front of the horses, trying not to startle them. Then I walked over to where Bay and Kraft were chatting with the pavilion manager. I could tell from the drift of the conversation that they'd been talkin' about the killing of William Stokes.

"Why'd anyone want to shoot him?" the manager asked.

Tommy Bay spit out a wad of tobacco juice. "Hell, when a man's stickin' up a place he ain't about to need any more motive. I figger old Stokes was just unlucky."

I intercepted the men as they started back to the meat wagon and asked, "Did you see anything of this masked bandit?"

Both men shook their heads. "Not a trace," George Kraft said. "And we ran around the back for a look."

"Why didn't you run after him down the hall?"

Tommy Bay spit again. "Hell, we wasn't askin' for trouble. The man had a gun! We figgered we'd just see where he run to. But we never did catch sight of him."

"Thanks a lot, boys," I told them. I got back in my car and drove off while Tommy Bay held the nervous horses in check.

That evening I paid another call on Eustace Carey. He was hobbling around in the back room of his general store, doing more work than I liked to see him tackle, and he greeted me a little sheepishly. "Hello, Doc. Checkin' up on me?"

"You shouldn't put too much weight on that leg, not quite yet."

"I know, I know. But there's work to be done."

"What about Whitehead?" I asked.

"What about him?"

"I'd hate to see you gunnin' for him."

"I'm not doing anything like that."

"He thinks you are. He's in hiding." I decided to settle the thing once and for all. "Look, would you go with me to see him, shake hands, and bury the hatchet?"

Eustace Carey thought about it. "Sure," he said finally. "Why not."

"Fine. I'll take you to him first thing in the morning."

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Next I went over to the sheriff's office and told him what I proposed to do. He snorted at the idea. "Doc, peacemakers never make it far in this here world."

"Would you rather I let them shoot each other?"

"No, no, of course not. But right now I'm more interested in who shot William Stokes."

"It still looks to you like attempted robbery? There's no chance the robbery was just a stunt to camouflage the murder?"

"Well, Doc, that's where you an' me differ. I didn't buy the robbery story to start with. I think Fields shot his employer an' made up the whole story of a masked outlaw."

"Did you question the other people at the Ferry House? That housekeeper, Mrs. Adams, for instance?"

Sheriff Lens nodded. "Says she was just gettin' dressed in her room when she heard the shot."

"Is there a Mr. Adams?"

"She's a widow. He was killed in the war."

"What about Jeff Whitehead?"

"I talked to him."

"You believe his story about hiding out from Eustace?"

"Seems likely."

"But do you believe it?"

"Mebbe." The sheriff leaned back in his chair. "When you takin' Carey to meet with him?"

"First thing in the morning."

"Good luck."

I telephoned the Ferry House and told Jeff Whitehead I'd be bringing Carey over first thing in the morning. He was reluctant, but he finally agreed.

Early the next morning I phoned April at home and told her I'd be out at the Ferry House till late morning. "You can reach me there if there's an emergency," I said.

"You're the one likely to have the emergency when Carey an' Whitehead get together."

"I'm hopin' things will go smoothly."

I picked up Carey in my runabout shortly after eight o'clock, noticing with satisfaction that his limp seemed better today. "You'll be dancin' a jig before long," I assured him.

"Yeah."

He was wearin' a hunting jacket that seemed heavy for June,

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and I noticed the right-hand pocket was weighted down. I brushed against it, felt the hard steel of the revolver, and yanked it out. "Damn it, Eustace, you can't go seein' him with a gun in your pocket! What kind of peacemakin' would that be?"

"It was only to defend myself, in case he tried somethin'."

"Well, he's not going to! So I'll just keep this gun."

I locked the gun in the side luggage compartment, then started the motor. Eustace was grumbling about going unarmed to the Ferry House, but by the time we reached our destination his mood improved.

"Whitehead's got a room upstairs," I said. "We'll go right up there. He's expecting us."

I led the way up the walk and opened the front door of the inn. At first glance I saw no one behind the clerk's desk and I wondered where Benny Fields might be. Then, as Carey limped in behind me, I suddenly saw a face appear from behind the counter. It was a masked man with mustache and beard, wearing a cowboy hat and a fringed leather jacket. He'd been trying to open the safe when we walked in.

I saw the gun in his hand and I yelled to Carey, "Hit the floor!" There was a deafening roar as the masked man fired directly at us.

I felt the bullet tug at my sleeve as it went by. Then I heard Carey gasp and go down hard. I turned and saw him on the floor, bleeding from a wound in his side near the waist.

The masked man raised the gun for another shot but thought better of it. He turned and ran down the long hall to the back door, just as he'd done the previous morning.

I wanted to go after him, but I had a bleeding, possibly dying, man on my hands. I knelt by Carey's side, wadding my handkerchief against the wound to stem the flow of blood. His eyes were open but he seemed to be going into shock.

Then, from that kneelin' position, I turned and looked down the hallway.

It was empty.

And even from this distance I knew the bolt was still in place on the back door.

I had to shout for assistance, but it was some moments before Jeff Whitehead appeared from his upstairs room.

"What is it?" he asked, seeing Carey on the floor. "What happened?"

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"Didn't you hear the shot?"

"No. I must have been dozin'."

"Call the ambulance, quick! He needs a hospital."

"Is he bad?"

I'd had time to examine the wound, which wasn't as deep as I'd first feared. "Not as bad as it could have been. This heavy jacket probably saved his life."

Whitehead hurried off to call the ambulance, and Fields and Mrs. Adams appeared from the dining room. "Where've you two been?" I asked. There was a redness about Fields's mouth that might have come from lipstick.

"I was in the kitchen having my morning coffee," Fields said. "Mrs. Adams just joined me and asked if I'd heard a shot."

"It was your bandit friend again, and he disappeared in the hallway the same as yesterday."

"My God!" Mrs. Adams looked as if she were going to faint. "Is it a ghost?"

"Let's take a look at that door," I said to Fields.

We went down the hall and examined it. The heavy bolt was still in place, locking the door from the inside. There was no way anyone could have gone through that door and left it bolted.

Benny Fields put his left hand on the bracket and pulled the bolt open with his right. "Still works as hard as ever," he said. Then he swung open the door and we looked outside. It was the same as it had been the day before. The gravel parking area was empty and undisturbed. The woods in the distance were gently peaceful.

I turned and retraced our steps down the hallway. The wallpaper was still faded and stained, but all of it was still firmly in place. Even where the former doors had been boarded up and papered over, there was no sign of a tear, crack, or hinge. This time I got a broomstick from the kitchen and poked at the ceiling, but there was no opening.

The masked bandit had vanished again, and this time I'd seen it with my own eyes.

I went back to tend to my patient while Mrs. Adams and Whitehead hovered nearby. Soon I could hear the ambulance bell approaching.

It was a puzzle, all right—as impossible a crime as I ever encountered.

Was I dealing with a murderous bandit who recklessly returned

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to the scene of his crime, or was I somehow part of an elaborate plot in which Eustace Carey had been the intended victim all along?

They told me at the hospital that Eustace Carey would live, and that was the best news I had all day. They'd probed for the bullet, removed it, and Carey was out of danger.

When I got back to my office, Sheriff Lens was waitin' to talk to me. "You actually seen this masked bandit, Doc?"

I nodded. "He was hidden behind the counter when we came in, apparently working on the safe. He fired one shot that just missed me and hit Carey. Then he took off down that same hallway and vanished."

"Did he look like Fields said?"

"Exactly." I went on to describe him.

"Why'd he be dumb enough to come back a second time? 'Cause he left the money the first time?"

"Could be. Or he might have been waitin' there by the safe just to get a shot at Carey."

"You said the bullet almost hit you first."

"That's true. If he was aimin' at Carey he was a poor shot."

"So where does that leave us, Doc?"

I thought about it. "He didn't get the money today either. Maybe he'll be back again tomorrow."

"You believe that?"

"No," I admitted.

"Until this mornin' I was ready to lock up Fields. Now I don't know what to do. You think it's a ghost, Doc?"

"No more than the bandstand 'ghost' was last summer."

"You mean it's more trickery? But how'd he work it? How'd he vanish from that hallway? I can't think of a single way it coulda been done."

"I can think of two ways," I told him, "and that's my trouble. Both of them would work once, but neither one would work twice."

"Two ways!"

"Look, Sheriff, I want to try an experiment. I want you to round up those two meat delivery men and bring them out to the Ferry House tonight. Can you do that?"

"You mean Tommy Bay and George Kraft? Sure, I can find 'em all right."

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"Good. I'll see you there at eight o'clock and maybe we'll catch our phantom."

In some ways it's harder to solve a mystery with two solutions than one with none. I spent the remainder of the afternoon pondering the two possible explanations before setting out on the drive to the inn. Finally I knew what had happened, and I knew how to prove it.

I arrived at the Ferry House a little before eight o'clock. Benny Fields was sweepin' the front hallway, looking unhappy. I asked what the trouble was and he replied, "The lawyer was here. He said Stokes's heirs might sell the inn. I'd be out of a job."

"If Sheriff Lens arrests you you'll be out of a job too," I pointed out.

"But how can he arrest me now?"

"Just pray that he doesn't. Is Jeff Whitehead still upstairs?"

"I think so, yes."

I went up and knocked on his door at the top of the stairs, imagining that I saw Mrs. Adams peeking out at me from her room across the hall. Whitehead answered at once and showed me in. "Has there been any break in the case, Doc?" he asked. "Can I go home now?"

"There'll be a break tonight, I think. And you've been free to go from the beginning."

"I was afraid with Carey prowlin' around—"

"Balderdash!" I snorted. "You've never been afraid of Eustace Carey in your life! I know the real reason you're here, so you can stop lyin' to me. I know all about—"

I was interrupted by the slamming of the front door downstairs, followed by the voice of Sheriff Lens calling my name. "Let's go downstairs," I said to Whitehead, "and we'll try to wind this thing up."

"I don't want to go," he muttered.

"Should I bring them all up here?"

"No . . ."

"Then come on."

I went down the hall to summon Mrs. Adams, then led the way downstairs to where the sheriff was waiting with the two deliverymen.

"What'd you drag us out here for?" Tommy Bay was muttering. "We don't know nothin' about these shootings!"

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I glanced at Benny Fields as he took his position behind the desk, and then at Mrs. Adams standing tall and grim at the foot of the stairs. I even looked down the long hallway to make certain I could see the bolted door at the end. This time the masked bandit would not escape.

"Let me tell you a story," I began. "It's the story of how William Stokes could have been killed yesterday mornin' by a masked bandit who escaped through a bolted door."

"Get on with it," George Kraft said. "I gotta get back to work."

"Well, Stokes was upstairs, just gettin' ready to come down, when he saw the meat delivery truck pull up out front. Only instead of Bay and Kraft he saw a masked man wearin' a fringed jacket and carrying a western revolver."

"*What*?" Tommy Bay gasped. "What in hell is this?"

"One of them—it doesn't matter which—entered first with the gun and held up Benny. The other one came up the front walk with the meat, chatting to himself so that Benny would think he heard two people talkin'. Then Stokes appeared and got himself shot, and the killer ran down the hall, unbolted the door, and went out. The one carrying the meat enters, helps Benny with the dyin' man, and then manages to slip down the hall to rebolt the door from the inside. Meanwhile, the killer ditched his costume and reappeared as a delivery man. With the confusion and all, Benny never realized that both delivery men weren't here all the time."

"Say," Benny Fields said, "it coulda been like that, now that I think of it."

"That's plumb crazy!" George Kraft exclaimed. "Even if it was true, why'd we bother to rebolt the door?"

"To frame Benny Fields for the killing," I said. "To make it appear that his story was impossible."

"You got any proof o' this?" Sheriff Lens asked quietly, his right hand resting on the butt of his gun.

I took a deep breath. "No, Sheriff, I don't—because none of it is true. I only said it *could* have happened this way."

"But it didn't?" He looked exasperated.

"Kraft and Bay weren't even on the scene of this morning's shooting. And I could see that bolted door before anyone went near it to fool with the lock. The method I've outlined couldn't have been used today, therefore it wasn't used yesterday. We can't believe that *two different* bandits would duplicate their crimes

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that exactly. No, it was the same person yesterday and today—and since Bay and Kraft couldn't have done it today, that makes 'em innocent of yesterday's killing too."

"I'm sure glad o' that!" Tommy Bay said.

Sheriff Lens wasn't satisfied. "Then what in hell'd I drag 'em down here for?"

"So I could dispose of the wrong answer before gettin' to the right one."

"Damn it, there's *no* other way it coulda been worked, Doc."

"Yes, there is."

"If the door was really bolted from the inside, an' if there's no other way outa that hall—"

"There's no other way. The walls, floor, and ceiling were examined by me personally."

"The killer entered the hallway, he didn't go through the bolted door and he didn't get out any other way. Then what happened to him?"

I glanced around at the others and started talking. "I was put off the track by the second shooting this mornin'. I even thought for a while that Eustace Carey was prob'ly the intended victim all along, that I'd been snookered into bringing him here for that purpose." I stared hard at Jeff Whitehead. "Jeff could have been the masked and bearded bandit. There was something about his being on the scene that didn't ring true anyhow. With all the commotion yesterday mornin' he stayed hidden in his room till I forced my way in. Why? Not because he feared Eustace Carey. That just didn't hold water."

"You think Whitehead killed Stokes to lure Carey out here somehow?" Sheriff Lens asked.

"The thought crossed my mind—until I remembered the bed. It was the bed that told me of Whitehead's guilt, and also of his innocence."

Jeff Whitehead stepped forward, starting to protest, but I held up a restraining hand. "No, no, I know you didn't kill anybody, Jeff. You're not the masked bandit."

"Then who in hell is?" Sheriff Lens demanded. "You've eliminated every man in the place!"

I glanced sideways at Mrs. Adams. "The killer never spoke. It could have been a woman."

"Mrs. Adams?"

"No. I happen to know she's innocent."

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"Then *who*? And *how*?"

"I hate to admit it, Sheriff, but you were right all along. There never was a masked bandit. Benny Fields made up the whole story, after he murdered his employer."

A trapped scream came from Benny's throat and he turned to run, dashing once more down that long hallway.

But this time Sheriff Lens had his revolver out. "Stop or I'll shoot, Benny!" he shouted.

Fields kept running. He was almost to the bolted door when the sheriff fired.

This time Benny Fields didn't disappear.

"You could have killed him, Sheriff."

"I only aimed for his legs."

Mrs. Adams was hysterical, her face pressed against Whitehead's shoulder. Kraft and Bay merely stood there. I told one of them to call for an ambulance.

"I should've arrested him yesterday mornin'," the sheriff said. "He had guilt written all over him."

"I guess he did," I had to agree. "I suppose Stokes caught him with his hand in the cash, or else they just had a violent argument. Anyway, Benny pulled out a revolver and shot his employer. I don't think any of it was planned in advance, and he must have been horrified when Bay and Kraft came in the front door moments later.

"He managed to hide the pistol behind the counter, and he made up the first story that popped into his head—about a masked bandit who was tryin' to rob the place and killed Stokes. His story was possible, until you noticed that the hall door was still bolted on the inside. Then Benny Fields was in big trouble."

"Okay, I saw all that the first day," Sheriff Lens spouted. "But what about the shootin' this mornin'? You *saw* the masked bandit! You *saw* him disappear down this very hallway!"

"Well, what would you have done in Benny's shoes? He's free but likely to be arrested durin' the next day or two. His only chance is to stage another appearance of the masked bandit—to convince everyone his story is true. Carey and I were just unlucky enough to arrive at the wrong moment. The victims could just as well have been Bay and Kraft makin' another meat delivery. He didn't mean to kill Eustace—in fact, it was better not to, 'cause that would give him two witnesses to the bandit's existence."

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"But he did vanish in the hallway! You tol' me so, Doc!"

"Indeed he did. But even that had to be part of his plan. When he thought of a masked bandit, he described him as dressed in clothes he already owned—I'm sure you'll find them hidden somewhere, along with the gun—and the rest of his description fit too. Benny was fairly short, but he said the bandit was just a little taller than him. Cowboy boots would add that extra inch or two. So he waited there, crouched behind the desk in his disguise."

"What if one of the other employees—like Mrs. Adams—had spotted him first?"

"I'm sure he'd have shot anyone—he didn't care where his witness came from, so long as there was somebody to back up his story." I led the sheriff back down the hall to the bolted door. "He gimmicked this bolt in a simple way. You remember I examined the lock yesterday and all the screws were tight. But look now—you can see the ends of wooden toothpicks around these two screws holdin' the bolt receiver to the door frame.

"Sometime last night he removed these screws and slightly enlarged their holes. The result was that though the door *looked* bolted, a turn of the knob and a tug pulled these two screws out of the door frame and the door opened.

"When Fields was through the door he simply pulled it closed behind him. The loose screws went back in their holes and the door looked as if it were *still* bolted. Later he put the ends of toothpicks in the holes to tighten the screws."

Sheriff Lens scratched his head. "How'd you tumble to this?"

"Two things. When I saw Fields after this morning's shooting, there was a little redness around his mouth. He'd yanked off the false beard and mustache too fast in disposin' of his costume. Then, when he and I went down to examine the door, he held his left hand on the receiver bracket to keep the screws from comin' out again when he pulled the bolt."

"Hell, you mighta *seen* the bandit go through the door! Or ran down an' tried it right away. Or the screws mighta fallen on the floor instead'a going back in their holes!"

"Sure, any of those things could have happened, Sheriff—but none of them would have been fatal to his plan. He'd just have said the screws musta been loose all along and that's how the bandit escaped yesterday too. We'd know he was lyin' but we couldn't have proved it. When the trick did work, he was content

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to go along with the seeming impossibility."

"It was a simple killin' and he sure made it complicated!"

"He invented a lie about a crime that unexpectedly became impossible and then had to invent a method for bringin' it off, just so people would believe him."

"What about Jeff Whitehead an' the bed? What was all that about?"

Jeff and Mrs. Adams were still standing together and I lowered my voice. "When I found him hidin' in his room yesterday morning, the bed was all made up with the spread on it. Now he hadn't been outa the room, and he'd had the *Do Not Disturb* sign on the door. Nobody makes up their own bed at an inn—not when there's a housekeeper on duty. I think Mrs. Adams made up the bed because she shared it with him. That's the real reason he was here in the first place. The made-up bed told me they were guilty of a crime—but not of murder."

Sheriff Lens could only scratch his head and say, "I'll be doggoned!"

"Well," Dr. Sam Hawthorne concluded, "they found Benny's disguise and the gun hidden behind the big old kitchen stove. And a check of the books showed he had been stealing small amounts from the inn for years. So the case was all wrapped up.

"Another—ah—small libation? Next time I'll tell you about that November's election—an election in which a man was murdered while he was alone in a voting booth. Now, *that* was an impossible crime!"

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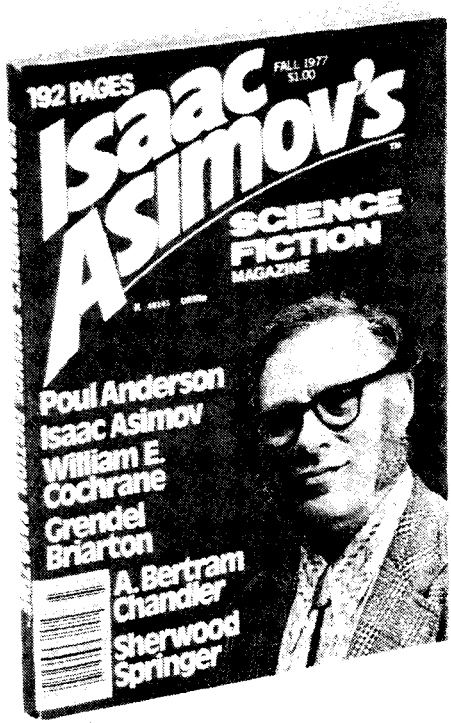

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